FOSTERING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AMONG ADULT MEN BY ADDRESSING INTERGENERATIONAL NEGLECT IN MEN IN NORTHERN HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Jackie H. Williams, Jr.

BA, Southern Connecticut State University, 2002
MA, Hartford Seminary, 2010
MA, United Theological Seminary, 2020

Mentors

Kenneth Cummings, DMin
Al Kennon, DMin
Brenda Braam, DMin

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Al Kennon, DMin
Brenda Braam, DMin

Date: _____

Approved:

_____

_____
Faculty Mentor:

_____
Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies:

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ABSTRACT

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The context is the Northern Hill United Methodist Church. There is a long history of neglect in fostering positive mental health awareness among men, which is primarily due to different expectations, stigmas, and personal factors. The hypothesis will be tested using pre- and post-survey questions to assess differences in participants' understanding of mental health and their likelihood of seeking professional help. The goal is to promote mental health awareness, to prove through scripture that addressing the neglect of mental health can lead to the devastation of the mind, body, and soul, and bring wholeness to their mental health.

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DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of my dissertation is fostering mental health awareness among men by addressing intergenerational neglect at the Northern Hill United Methodist Church. My dissertation consists of six chapters that build on one another to foster greater mental health awareness. Each chapter is rooted in distinct foundations that pull the dissertation together, helping the reader understand the longstanding neglect of mental health and how that neglect can be addressed through various means.

Chapter One focuses on my journey in ministry that has led me to author this dissertation. This chapter highlights various traumas in my life that have left me broken and in need of healing. It also shares how social stigmas and my family negatively impacted my life, which contaminated every area of my life, including within my ministry. Although I suppressed my traumas, my body still reacts to them, which continues to feed how I make decisions. My experience with the ventilator has taught me some very valuable lessons that contributed to drafting this dissertation. This journey shares some moments in how my mental health has impacted my leadership role negatively. This journey will highlight my hunger to help my brothers become more aware of their mental health.

Chapter Two reflects the biblical insight of John 5:1-15. This passage, which recounts Jesus' healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, serves as the cornerstone for understanding how acts of compassionate intervention can break longstanding cycles of

neglect and illness. By focusing on this narrative, I laid a theological groundwork that illustrates how faith communities can emulate that same model of restorative care by addressing mental health and intergenerational neglect with a spirit of healing and hope.

Examining Chapter Three, I traced the historical roots of intergenerational neglect through the Freedmen's Bureau. This chapter used the Freedmen's Bureau as a case study showing that the danger of neglecting one's mental health can devastate not only one's life but also generations. The historical foundation of the Freedmen's Bureau underscores that it is not enough to focus solely on a person's physical needs; their mental health must also be addressed. This chapter informs my current approach to fostering mental health awareness among men.

In Chapter Four, I discussed the theological foundations that will inform the healing of mental health neglect. This chapter underpins my entire dissertation through the theology of Soteriology. The framework of Soteriology will be crucial in highlighting the healing process among men. Soteriology is the branch of theology concerned with salvation. Soteriology is not just about the study of salvation but also about experiencing God's healing and deliverance. This deliverance within the study of salvation is both physical and spiritual. Healing is an essential part of Soteriology because it reaches beyond the consequence of sin to the healing of the mind, body, and soul.

Chapter Five integrates a specific discipline into the project to enhance mental health awareness. To underpin the project, the aim is to draw on the discipline of education to aid both the understanding of the stigma and its healing. Since education is a broad subject, the research will center more on the Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory of education to better assess its usefulness in promoting mental health awareness

among men. Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory can be helpful in men's mental health by helping them understand and manage their negative thoughts.

Lastly, in Chapter Six, the focus will be on the project analysis conducted at Northern Hill United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas. This chapter will outline the objectives, methodology, and assessment of our project. This chapter provides a brief overview of the project's aims and its methodology. This project lasted six weeks and focused on each of the dissertation's foundations. This chapter will demonstrate how the project helped participants become more aware of their mental health daily.

In conclusion, these six chapters will challenge men not only to become more aware of their mental health but also to take action to address it. Men often blame themselves for their struggles due to the stigma surrounding them. For this reason, men tend to turn to substance abuse and violent behavior rather than seeking out help. According to Richard V. Reeves in his book called *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to do About It*, states that "Define their worth by their ability to contribute economically to a household."[1]

For this reason, men have difficulty maintaining a healthy self-image when unemployment is high. Women perceive men as unwilling to relinquish the reins of power, whereas men do not view it as a matter of gaining or holding power. It is more like a bit in their mouths that guides and motivates them. So much depends on the man fulfilling the social construct of being a breadwinner and protector of his home. This, by itself, can cause a man to fall into deep depression and even develop suicidal thoughts.

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[1] Richard V. Reeves, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why it Matters, and What to Do About it* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2024), 20.

Men becoming more aware of their mental health and the stigmas they were raised to believe can be the first step in providing self-care and the vulnerability to seek out professional help.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Throughout my life, I have consistently experienced mental health challenges, although I was not fully aware of them at the time. It has been a part of my family history to handle mental health issues and trauma with the correct approach to suck it up and move on. I have discovered that everybody has some trauma that has compromised their day-to-day living. This is not to say no one else has trauma, but just that among adult males, trauma has been a constant that was never adequately addressed. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, "Men are more likely to die by suicide than women."[1]

Slavery, for example, among African Americans, White America has tried all it could to erase the horrors of slavery and Jim Crow. Still, it keeps showing up in present-day generations in their mental health trauma. In fact, in Dr. Na'im Akbar's book called *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery*, he states:

> Slavery was legally ended in excess of 100 years ago, but over 300 years experienced in its brutality and unnaturalness constituted a severe psychological and social shock in the minds of African Americans. This shock was so destructive to natural life processes that the current generation of African Americans, although we are five to six generations removed from the actual

[1] National Institute of Mental Health, May 2024, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/.

> experience of slavery, still carry the scars of this experience in both our social and mental lives.[2]

My childhood trauma significantly influenced my ministry, though I didn't realize it at the time. At an early age, between the ages of five and eleven, I was being molested by my neighbor's older sons, who, in turn, rented me out to other men in the neighborhood for six dollars. I was constantly threatened that my parents would be killed if I ever told anyone. I still carry the fear and shame I once felt. My parents were not totally oblivious to this, for they knew something was wrong with me, but could not identify it specifically. My father thought the best answer was to beat it out of me, but fear of these boys was stronger than my father's belt. My Father was a local pastor who was well known for his no-nonsense sermons, especially against homosexuality.

Adult men need healing from the trauma that has impacted their lives from one generation to the next. According to Frederick Douglass, "To enslave men, successfully and safely, it is necessary to have their minds occupied with thoughts and aspirations short of the liberty of which they are deprived."[3] These young men kept my mind occupied with the fear of my parents being murdered, so freedom was never an option for me. I tried to tell my father once, but my father's anti-homosexual sermons made me believe that he would never be able to handle that kind of truth, so I kept it to myself.

Jesus wants to heal us everywhere we are hurt, and I was a little boy who was hurting beyond measure, but it felt like God was on vacation for me. In addition, I also had to endure being a dark-skinned boy who was looked upon in my community as

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[2] Na'im Akbar, *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery* (Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions and Associates, 1996), 3.

[3] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Chicago, IL: Johnson Publishing Company, 1855), 136.

undesirable. Samuel Wells, in his book called *Living God's Future Now,* converses with contemporary prophets, quotes Anthony Reddie, quoting Kierkegaard in his conversation, saying, "That life is lived forward but understood backward. We create identities by looking backwards at the direction from which we have come."[4] Unfortunately, looking back only made me feel more shame as I moved forward in my life.

I have been saved for over forty-five years and have been preaching the gospel for forty-two of those years. I am just now discovering how those traumas I have experienced, although buried deep in the crevices of my subconscious mind, are still playing an active role in my daily life. Yes, our traumas are still alive, still have influence, still have access to our lives, and they are more destructive now than ever before. The wounds of trauma do not simply go away; if left unaddressed, they will perpetuate a cycle of violence that will continue for many generations. The most devastating violence that will occur is the violence we inflict on ourselves through the words we say to ourselves.

I read a book by James A. Houck Jr. called *When Ancestors Weep*. There is a section in the book where the author describes pricking his finger. It was not serious, but there was little blood. Just when he was about to wipe it away, one of the elders of his Indian tribe asked him a question: "What do you see when you see your blood?"[5] Hearing that question, he did not understand and could not answer it. After a long pause, the elder told him he sees the DNA of all his ancestors who came before him. He also sees their

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[4] Samuel Wells, *Conversations with Contemporary Prophets* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2022), 129.

[5] James A. Houck, Jr., *When Ancestors Weep: Healing the Soul from Intergenerational Trauma* (Bloomington, IN: Abbott Press, 1973), 1.

trauma and pain that is still affecting him to this very day. Job 14:1 tells us that a man born of a woman is of a few days, and those days will be filled with trouble. No one is exempt from trouble, so the question is how we shall respond to the traumas that will surely come into our lives. Life is filled with both good and bad days, and we must learn how to navigate both. I know we do not want the bad days to come, but they are necessary to help shape us into what God wants us to be. We cannot discover God's best for our lives without them. When those traumatic moments come into our lives, they have a way of causing our lives to become unmanageable, so much so that we find it challenging to be in a relationship with others; yes, even our relationship with God will be a struggle to maintain.

I spent my whole life trying to fit in, so I tried gangs, the Nation of Islam, the U.S Army and sports. When everything else didn't work, I finally tried the church. Unfortunately, the church perpetuated more trauma on me and made me feel unsafe. To this very day, the church has never been a safe space for me to express my pain and trauma. I knew enough of the bible to know that God was concerned about my pain and trauma, but I could not understand why the church did not feel the same way. They seem to be interested only in getting me to heaven by pointing out my sinful behavior. This deeply influenced the kind of ministry God was calling me to; I became very aware that the ministry I wanted to foster would be a place where people could feel safe sharing their deepest pains.

In 1980, God called me to preach, which was not surprising to me, because I had known this was my calling since I was 13, though I fought it for most of my life. I couldn't grasp why he would want someone as broken, afraid, unattractive, and abused as

me. Somehow, I lost my way from my original intent to make the church a safe space for the traumatized. I spent most of my ministry focusing on studying scripture, but for the wrong reasons. Most preachers around me were much older than I was, and I felt like I was competing with them in knowledge and preaching skills. In my early years, ministry was competitive. I worshipped at the throne of knowing more and preaching better than the next guy, all for the sake of feeling better about myself.

Louie Giglio, in his book *The Air I Breathe: Worship as a Way of Life,* tells us that "we are all worshippers. The question is what we are worshipping, signifying that we can be breathing through worship, but not good oxygen because we are not getting oxygen from the right source."[6] In those early years, the idea of worshiping God was not part of my Christian education. My Christian education focused on ensuring my behavior aligned with scripture, but it never occurred to me that I lacked the power to do so without the Holy Spirit. I guess you can say that I stopped breathing because, as much as I knew about God, the fundamentals of worship were lacking, which would be extremely important to my healing later.

I recall an incident when I couldn't catch my breath and needed an external source to help me breathe. It was when I contracted the COVID-19 virus. One of the side effects of the virus was an inability to breathe without a ventilator. The average person's oxygen saturation is between 90% and 100%, but mine was 81%. The strange thing was that I felt like I was breathing normally even as I was losing air. I had to spend seven months on a hospital ventilator in an induced coma, utterly unaware of my surroundings. All my

[6] Giglio Louie, *Air I Breath: Worship as a Way of Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Publishing, 2003), 1.

nightmares during my coma revolved around being trapped in a body that kept recalling every buried trauma that occurred in my life to the surface, traumatizing me all over again.

As I reflected on my experiences with my inability to catch my breath, I can see now how trying to fit in with Church life kept me from breathing properly with God. I was hiding all my pain and shame because I knew the church had proven to be an unsafe space to share this. How is our spiritual breathing? I believe this is a good question to ask in times like these because, on one level, we may think that we are breathing well, but we are not. What does it mean to breathe well? To breathe spiritually well means to live with God, rooted and grounded in prayer. Prayer is that external source or the oxygen mask that allows the breath of God to flow through us. Some of us might respond to the question about our spiritual breathing by saying, "My breathing is fine; I go to church every Sunday, and I am in prayer meetings every morning and evening." My breathing is fine, but this is the illusion we all fall into: though we participate in all these spiritually enriching activities, we might be lacking the breath of God in our lives.

Whitney R. Simpson stated in her book *Holy Listening: With Breath, Body and the Spirit*, "God is the giver of life and breath. Miraculously, your breath flows in and out of your body, offering life. You live in the physical sense with your body and in the spiritual sense with your spirit, yet no life exists either in the body or spirit without the starting point of the breath. "While ministering, I didn't realize my breathing was poor and that I needed God's oxygen. I need him to be the air I breathe, but the air I was breathing at the time was trying to cover up my pain, shame, and rejection through my trauma.

Early in my ministry, I shared that I fell into a competitive mindset against other preachers, which meant I had no time for prayer, just studying. It had not yet occurred to me that prayer is essential to sustaining my relationship with God. Prayer is the equivalent of exhaling, while God's love is the equivalent of inhaling. I have come to realize that the degree to which we are grounded in a life of prayer with God is the degree to which we are partially communicating with God. Exhaling is not all there is for breathing; there must also be inhaling. Many of us have no problem exhaling our prayers to God, but we have difficulty inhaling God's breath of love. You are not breathing if all you are doing is exhaling; there must be an exchange of inhaling and exhaling to constitute a breath. I love what Henri Nouwen stated, "Prayer is not a pious decoration of life, but the breath of human existence."[7] Prayer is the way we allow the presence of God to fill our lives day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute. This is essentially called abiding.

In John chapter fifteen, as Jesus is about to go to the cross, he shares with his disciples his last words by summarizing the previous three years of his sermons, saying, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done" (Jn. 15:7). We can summarize the entirety of the Christian life with this verse, calling us to abide. This is the secret to the healing of a life that has had the wind knocked out of it by life's trauma. The ministry, for the most part, has been about hiding my pain while trying to help others with their pain. Have you noticed that we do not even think about our breathing until we are running out of air? We can do nothing well without

[7] Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York, NY: Crossroad Book, 1989), 2.

breathing, which is why we constantly remind people to take a breath when they are in a stressful situation: they may stop breathing.

Neglecting our mental health has a way of knocking the wind out of us, causing us to express it in different ways that are not healthy for our lives. No matter how you express having the wind knocked out of you, it is no fun. Just as the disciples discovered when they faced the wind knocked out of them after witnessing Jesus' crucifixion. They never saw it coming, even though Jesus had warned them it would happen; this was not how they envisioned the conclusion of his ministry on earth. What do you do when life presents you with a scenario that challenges everything you imagined and believed in your entire life? My whole life has been a series of having the wind knocked out of me because the trauma of my life has led me to hide. The call on my life was sure, but I had convince my call was greater than my pain and that God that somehow the mission was more important than the messenger.

John 20:19-23 provides an account of this divine encounter. I love that Jesus arrives just when we need him most, not with condemnation but with his peace. The disciples, like many of us, did not respond to their fears admirably, but Jesus came with words of peace and hope. "Peace be unto you" is a declaration of peace to us and not to our situation. God is more interested in our position of peace than our circumstances. All of us in this life will face trouble, and we need to structure our prayer life so we can walk on our troubled water rather than asking God to be a bridge over it. There is nothing wrong with asking God to be your bridge over our troubled waters at the beginning of our walk, but we must eventually grow up to walk on our troubled waters as Peter did (Mt. 14:22-33).

Still not spiritually breathing well, God called me to pastor my first church, the Bad Hersfeld Church of God in Christ, a small Pentecostal church in Bad Hersfeld, West Germany. Looking back, I cannot understand why. I believe I was a good pastor, as far as I can tell, because my focus was on creating safe spaces for people to express their pain and suffering. I also focused on the community to address the issues plaguing it. And lastly, I reached out to the Ethiopian refugees in our city to provide clothing. I often would have meetings with rival gangs in my backyard to discuss how to turn their violence towards each other into serving and protecting the community. But despite all of this, I had serious flaws that would undermine what I believed God was calling me to do.

I had become unhealthy, cranky, controlling, and numb. I knew I was pastoring a church that was traumatized as well, and was determined to fix them, all the while, I could not see that I needed to be fixed and healed as well. I found myself a lot like what Pastor Ronald H. Wean said in his book *Healing Traumatized Churches*, "Unable to use creative, logical, and empathetic means of healing their trauma. Instead of healing, I buried the problem. I buried it under the tombstone with a mark saying MOVE ON."[8] I was guilty of doing precisely what the church was doing, except moving on meant fighting the trauma that not only plagued the church but also the community.

Up to this point, I still had no idea that my trauma extended beyond myself and that their trauma extended beyond the church and the community. We were all wounded and traumatized long before we were born. We were all born into sin, causing us to have a natural disposition against God and his purpose. We all buried our traumas and

[8] Ronald H. Wean, *Healing Traumatized Churches: A Journey Towards Healthy, Faithful Resiliency in Drama Format* (San Francisco, CA: HTC Ministries, 2021), 6.

funeralized them, saying, “earth to earth, dust to dust, and ashes to ashes,” not realizing that we were only addressing part of the problem. If we are to heal from our traumas truly, we must begin to reach forward toward our healing, allowing ourselves to address our lack of mental health awareness.

I love the analogy of a doctor treating a patient without considering the patient's history, as described in Isabel Wilkerson's book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. She states in her book, “Looking beneath the history of one’s country is like learning that alcoholism or depression runs in one’s family or that suicide has occurred more often than might be usual or, with the advances in medical genetics, discovering that one has inherited the markers of a BRCA mutation for breast cancer.”[9] The adult male community, as well as all communities, must take an honest, hard look at our history of neglecting our mental health if we are going to heal ourselves truly.

Although I learned so much from pastoring that church in Germany, God saw fit, despite my flaws, to call me to serve under the leadership of Bishop Benjamin Watts as a worship leader for the next twenty-five years. It was during this season that I felt the need to go to school. Up until now, I only had a High School Diploma and intended to go to school. My father and the circle of preachers he ran with said that the seminary was a cemetery for preachers. The people in my circles saw no value in Seminary training, and neither did I until I witnessed Bishop Watts receive his Doctorate degree from Yale. This pursuit of education would broaden the different kinds of people and thoughts I would be around, which would shape my life.

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[9] Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontent* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2020), 15.

After twenty-five years of service at Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church and pursuing an education God saw fit to call me to, Mount Bethel Missionary Baptist Church called me to be their senior pastor. I knew this church was more wounded than the last one I pastored, so I set out to fix them as well. At this point, I still did not realize that I was a wounded soldier. For eighteen years, I leaked all over the church my insecurities, my pain, my traumas, and my shame. It was during this time that I got sick with COVID and was in a coma for a long period of time. It was during this time that all my traumas from childhood began to surface, re-traumatizing me all over again.

Due to my illness, I had to move to a warmer climate in San Antonio, Texas, where I am presently serving at Northern Hills United Methodist Church. This church nurtured me and loved me in ways they had no idea. It was here that I would display all the aftershocks of being in a coma for so long. I had become severely depressed and suicidal. This surprised my family and made them fearful for me and of me. At one point, I tried to jump off a bridge onto the highway, but I was unsuccessful. I've spent many days in mental hospitals and programs. I was diagnosed with PTSD both from my military experience and my childhood. I was also diagnosed with deep depression.

My family is the only black family in this very large church made up of Caucasians, which made me very uncomfortable at first. But this Church has gone through some trauma itself, one that is very noticeable, in that the men there were a lot like me, trying to fit in by burying their own personal traumas due to the stigma that exists in the church. from the trauma of the community, and the community's trauma stems from the institution of mental health neglect. In *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Joy Degruy asserts that reclaiming our past is essential for progress. It is in

understanding who we were that will free us to embrace who we now are (the meaning of Sankofa)."[10]

Sankofa is a tradition practiced in South Africa to help pull people out of Apartheid and prepare them for life after it. The community and church urgently need healing for mind, body, and soul. It is not just the community that needs to look back; the whole world would benefit from taking a long look at our history for global healing. Global healing starts with individual action. The concept mirrors an airplane emergency, where you must put on your own mask first before assisting others.

There is an emergency occurring within the African American community that necessitates an action we rarely take: looking back at the pages of history to a time that has traumatized us like no other. Neglecting our mental health has left an indelible mark on our psyche and DNA. For example, within the African American community, Dr. Gruy states that "The enslavement experience was one of continental violent attacks on body, mind, and spirit. Men, women, and children were traumatized throughout their lives, and the violent attacks during slavery persisted long after emancipation."[11] Practicing Sankofa in my personal life has led me to believe that some of the trauma has been passed down from my long line of black men and women who were victims of slavery, Jim Crow, Black Codes, and strange fruit.

Slavery left an indelible mark on African Americans, but also on the world, especially America. Isabel Wilkerson tells us, "To truly understand America, we must

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[10] Joy Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukee, MN: Uptone Press, 2005), 3.

[11] Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,* 9.

open our eyes to the hidden work of a caste system that has gone unnamed but prevails among us to our collective detriment, to see that we have more in common with each other and with cultures that we might otherwise dismiss, and to summon the courage to consider that therein may lie the answers."[12] It is this caste system that is systemic in every part of the American psyche. Long after slavery and Jim Crow, this caste system remains despite the civil rights movement. This has left a devastating impact on the mental health of the African American community, especially among men.

The foundation of this caste system was laid as far back as 1619, when the first slaves landed in America. African Americans have been trying to stay within our assigned caste as the lower class, while Whites strive to maintain their position as the upper caste. We must recalibrate our perspective on how we view ourselves as African Americans and how others perceive us. I see this expected caste system in my present church, but I'm pretty sure it is deliberate. When I approached the church with my project, they did not seem very happy with the topic I originally proposed. I was told that the church would not support anything that has anything to do with black history, slavery, and its trauma. I was forced to change my topic that was more palpable for this mostly white congregation.

To be clear, despite all of this, I still felt God's love from this congregation, and it has kept me from leaving. For some reason unbeknownst to me, I was able to share some of my pain with a few of our small groups that I attend, but I am still cautious of how much I share with them. During my time at Northern Hill, I had the courage to get therapy, which helped, but what really helped was the opportunity to play the piano for

[12] Wilkerson, *Caste,* 54.

the church and to give a midweek reflection on all the sermons our pastor preached. This opportunity came as a request that I made to the pastor concerning how my depression disqualifies me to serve; in fact, I believe it is important to allow me to serve in some capacity for our church for my healing. I shared with the pastor that I was seeing a therapist, but serving will be good for me because it provides community, purpose, and structure.

Pastor Lupina, a Mexican woman, admitted she had to apologize for deliberately keeping me from serving in the church until I felt better. But she now realizes that the balance between therapy and service can be incredibly healing if we can just get past the stigma surrounding our church. In my discussion with her, I shared that after a few weeks of serving, I was beginning to feel a lot better, primarily because my focus had shifted outward, helping me break the isolation and negative thoughts that kept looping in my head. I'm also blessed, especially when I play the piano for the congregation to express what's hard say. When I play, the anointing soothes, uplifts, and connects me with both God and the congregation.

In Martin Luther King's book, *A Gift of Love: Sermons from Strength to Love,* he stated:

> Jesus recognized the need for blending opposites. He knew that his disciples would face a difficult and hostile world, where they would confront the recalcitrance of political officials and the intransigence of the protectors of the old order. He knew that they would meet cold and arrogant men whose hearts had been hardened by the long winter of traditionalism. So he said to them, Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.[13]

[13] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Gift of Love: From Strength to Love and Other Preachings* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2012), 1.

With the support of the Pastor and congregation, I am healing, but I still have a battle with the wolves of anxiety, stress, and yes, suicidal thoughts that surround me, but Jesus words comfort me that he has sent us out as sheep among wolves. Jesus acknowledges that I would have challenges, but I don't have to do it all alone. He promised that he would never leave me or forsake me. I have the great shepherd gently leading and guiding me along the way of this journey. I have now gained enough understanding to accept God's leadership, which will lead me to seek out support with a therapist or a trusted friend.

Without realizing it, I have discovered that when I give my fifteen-minute reflection on the sermon preached the prior Sunday, I feel there are three common threads running through the message I share, no matter what the sermon is. The three common threads are God loves us, God won't leave us, and God won't let us die. No matter how daunting our situations in life become, God wants us to know those three things. I have made those three threads for my own personal devotion. Members have begun to see a difference in me as a result of serving in the church, and they have seen how the ministry I provide has helped them deal with the challenges they face daily.

In the Book of Luke, the author does not ignore the trauma of women being viewed as insubordinate, emphasizing that Jesus had concerns for the voiceless. The adult male community is also a concern for Jesus, and we must address it head-on with love if we have any chance of healing. The *Women's Bible Commentary* by Jane D. Schaberg and Sharon H. Ringe states, "Warning! The Gospel of Luke is an extremely dangerous

text, perhaps the most dangerous in the bible. Because it contains a great deal of material about women that is found nowhere else in the Gospels."[14]

Our nation is attempting to do the opposite of what Luke did concerning women by excluding women's experiences from history. For example, our nation is trying to erase any record of the African American community's experiences in America. Psalms 91:14 says, "Because he has set his love upon me, he will deliver me," which is a profound reality that many African Americans have yet to experience as a healing balm to their century-old trauma. In my experience with my personal conversations with the men, in particular, I can recognize some of the baggage they were carrying that was similar to mine, and for that reason, I knew I was not alone with my mental health issue.

In Serene Jones' book, *Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World,* she tells us, "The reality of violence haunts us all, daily, in varying ways and to varying degrees. Watching the evening news reveals images of exploding buildings, nations falling apart, entire populations vanishing, millions perishing, and children losing hope for their future. What these news stories fail to show us in their pictures of devastated lives is the haunting reality that for the living, violence often continues to exist and expand."[15] The trauma that I experienced that left me dealing with depression and PTSD still causes people to wonder why I was given this great opportunity to serve, and for that reason has tried to have me removed, but God has proven to them that service and mental health go hand in hand. I have become the poster boy of that fact.

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[14] Jane Schaberg and Sharon H. Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 493.

[15] Serene Jones, *Trauma+Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 11.

As I reflect on my trauma of being in a coma for almost six months with COVID-19, I suffered through nightmares for the entire six months. The only saving grace for me was the Spirit of God, who kept reminding me that He loves me and would not let me go through this alone. Peter Scazzero shares with us in his book *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* that "God built brokenness and weakness into the fabric of all life when he set in motion the consequences of the fall. From that point forward, God declares that all relationships would be marked by pain and misunderstanding, even in the best communities."[16] The relationship between man and God was destined to be traumatizing, but God, through his Son Jesus, provided the healing we need. Both the oppressed and the oppressors require this healing of our dignity and honor.

There is a good chance that the women of the Bible, who had dignity and honor, had been traumatized by their station in life as subservient. Their sense of worth left them feeling shameful, rejected, and abandoned. These feelings can be passed down from one generation to another and will continue to do so if the issue is not addressed. This is the case for the men at Northern Hills, who feel that it is not acceptable for them to share their feelings, causing them to neglect their mental health. This has caused generations of men to suffer in silence, trying to suppress their mental anguish.

In John Bradshaw's New York Times best-selling book *Healing the Shame that Binds You, he* states that "As I delved deeper into the destructive power of toxic shame, I've come to see that it directly touches the age-old theological and metaphysical discussion generally referred to as the problem of evil."[17] I believe the reason why shame

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[16] Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2021), 197.

is a problem of evil is that it can debilitate one's life so thoroughly that it is difficult to overcome. Theologically, the roots of the problem of evil are found in demonic activity because evil is considered the domain of the devil.

John 10:10 tells us that the devil comes to kill, steal, and destroy, and this is what shame does: it kills our sense of dignity, steals our sense of joy, and destroys our sense of self-worth. In Shelly Rambo's book called *Spirit and Trauma: a Theology of Remaining,* she tells us that "Trauma is described as an encounter with death. This encounter is not, however, a literal death but a way of describing a radical event that shatters all that one knows about the world and all the familiar ways of operating within it."[18] Living a lifestyle of trauma under the umbrella of neglect for mental health issues can create a disconnection within a community regarding who they are as an adult male.

The opportunity to share every Wednesday night, and now in our men's Bible study, has allowed me to experience true healing as I allow myself to be vulnerable. Some people distrust me or judge me as unqualified because I have depression and PTSD, and I can still feel that stigma. Most of the men who are in our church are retired military, and most of them have PTSD that they do not like to talk about. I remember sharing one of the traumas that I experienced early in my military career about being buried alive by four white supremacist Sergeants, and how they would threaten me by telling me that they would make sure I became a casualty of friendly fire. I was literally

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[17] John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communication, 1988), 2.

[18] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit a Theology of Remaining and Trauma* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 4.

trapped with four white racist soldiers. By sharing that story, a few men felt comfortable sharing their own, and, most importantly, became more open to seeking help.

Men, in general, avoid seeking mental health care due to the expectation and belief that real men don't have mental health problems. It is a real stigma in the church that has kept men from seeking out help of any kind. Those biblical characters did not have access to mental health support, but they had God's Word. Though men were not suppressed as women were, they were suppressed by forcing them to never express their mental pain. All kinds of mental signals surround adult men to keep their pain suppressed and never to seek out any mental health support.

The Northern Hill United Methodist Church and its surrounding community appear resistant to the idea that they need emotional support and genuine, authentic agape love. This intergenerational neglect of mental health is an invisible chain that has held us captive for so long that the chains are not visible to us, as well as to those around us. Very few people have awakened to the chains that have ensnared us in our past, especially among young African men. Isabella Wilkerson tells us in her book *Caste: The Origins of our Discontent*, "Some of these programs go without notice, so perfectly attuned they are to their task, so deeply embedded in the drone of existence."[19]

After discovering this, not just with the men at Northern Hills but also among the community. I decided to change my old topic to the new topic that focuses on the mental health of men, the neglect that will harm them in the long run. This change really challenged me because I was very angry about having to change after all the research I've

[19] Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontent*, 34.

done on the old topic. I almost quit that day because I couldn't see how I was going to pull this off in such a short period of time.

My anger really challenged my mental health to the point that I did not think I would recover. All my negative emotions of depression, anxiety, and shame started to run wild in me. It was truly frustrating for me to try to do something that I felt was very important to the African American Church, but then it occurred to me that just might be the issue. When I started writing my paper, I was in a different context where the congregation was predominantly black. My topic was centered around dealing with intergenerational trauma passed down through slavery to present-day African Americans.

Our country was in the middle of trying erase African American history with Texas taking the lead. The truth is, I did not know the congregation well enough to understand how they felt about the erasure of African American history, so I decided to ask during our Sunday School class. Their response surprised me because they seemed ambivalent about the subject. They did ask some honest questions about why we can't get over the negative history of slavery that was so long ago. I pointed out that the trauma of slave ancestors is remembered in their bodies and souls, and it will be passed down from one generation to the next.

As Bessel Van der Kolk mentioned earlier, our bodies remember our traumatic experiences. In Dr. Mariel Buque's book *Break the Cycle: A Guide to Healing Intergenerational Trauma, it* says that "Intergenerational trauma forces us to numb our creativity, joy, and overall zest for life. Your intergenerational higher self, however, helps

you reignite your potential and rise out of the ashes."[20] This wear and tear can be passed down from one generation to the next through our DNA.

Dr. Buque states, "Trauma isn't the only experience that can be passed down from generation to generation. There may have been gentle words of love, power, or affirmation that were reflected to you as well."[21] We can have traumatic responses that cause the body to attack itself for generations due to childhood trauma, but it can also be trying to heal itself through intergenerational healing. The Freedmen's Bureau, which assisted these former slaves in navigating their new station in life, did not consider the traumatic impact that slavery had had on their psyches. As I started to make my transition of the focus of my topic from slavery to mental health trauma, I found it to be a smooth transition.

If we are to heal from intergenerational neglect of mental health, we must adopt a holistic approach that brings healing to mind, body, and soul. This approach must be infused with the love of God. It must be God's love, as any other love will only deepen the wounds of the trauma that has been passed down. We will engage with love, which encompasses compassion, forgiveness, respect, warmth, and more. We will explore how we can nurture all of this within ourselves. We must be vulnerable enough to allow God to envelop us in His healing love. We must allow ourselves to be defenseless so that He can be our defender. Men are not accustomed to wanting a defender; it has been ingrained

[20] Mariel Buque, *Break the Cycle: A Guide to Healing Intergenerational Trauma* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2024), 28.

[21] Buque, *Break the Cycle*, 26.

in them that they are the defender, and the need for a defender somehow diminishes their sense of manhood.

I believe it is only through the church that trauma can be healed. In other words, I believe part of the healing is that men must allow themselves to be vulnerable to the church community, but the church must be vulnerable to God in order to minister to the traumatized in our community. My goal has been to tether the love of God to the reality of trauma passed down from one generation to the next for hundreds of years. Any sane person would never expect people to overcome the emotional pain inflicted upon them overnight. Adult men have never received any counseling of any kind to help them heal from the pain of slavery.

I do not think the man at the pool of Bethesda received counseling of any kind, yet he rose from his station as a sinner to rise into the newness of life. How did he rise? It was love personified in Jesus that lifted him. I can say that allowing myself to be vulnerable and becoming more educated about the stigmas around us that play on our minds have helped me on my journey to healing. For example, concerning the African American community, it was that same love that elevated us despite the Middle Passage journey, despite the cruelty of slavery, and despite our being made to labor a lifetime for a master who would pay us with beatings. It was that love that caused us to rise despite the indignity of the Black Codes, convict leasing, peonage, and Jim Crow.

Richard Rohr tells us in his book *Essential Teachings on Love* that "God's love is maintaining us in existence with every breath we take. As we take another, it means that God is choosing us now and now and now."[22] There is a need for the Adult male

[22] Richard Rohr, *Essential Teachings on Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2018), 24.

community to unlearn some things to take advantage of the love that God provides. They must consciously adapt to God's love for them and allow Him to love them through intergenerational neglect of mental health. Before God's love, we were all blind, but now our eyes are open—and not only open, but we can also see. Not all open eyes can see.

The Sankofa tradition teaches us to move forward by looking back and learning from our past. Unfortunately, I have been so focused on what I have endured that I couldn't see what has helped me to endure such hardship. I can truly say that God has been faithful to me. I couldn't have succeeded without his love. God's love has carried me, and I must rely on that love to awaken me, for the world we are living in is leaving us behind. Dr. Joy Degruy continues to say, "In the future, if we are to move ahead and thrive, we need to understand and accept who we are. Knowing who and what we are, we can identify our strengths and build upon them. Then, using our strengths, we need to heal from the injuries of our history."[23]

Dr. Gary Williams tells us in his book called *His Love Endures Forever*, "The love of God will stand when all else fails because God always stands. Grasping this is particularly important for us when we face trials in our lives or when even our lives themselves become a trial to us."[24] The church must grasp this and demonstrate it to the communities they serve. God has set His love on us, according to Psalm 91:14, and that love will deliver us from the trauma of our past. There is nothing more powerful than

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[23] Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 157.

[24] Gary Williams, *His Love Endures Forever* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 134.

love, for God himself is love. If this is true, and I believe it is, then we need a revival of love in the church, especially in our churches.

The world has at its disposal a very powerful weapon that can unite us and heal the ills that separate us. However, we must face the reality that some people and nations prefer darkness over light. I believe the reason we are not healed is that the church has been operating with human love, which is not strong enough to turn the world upside down. Dr. Gary Williams tells us, “God’s love is different from human love because it is a beautifying love. God does not find people who are beautiful and then decide to love them. Rather, he makes the objects of love beautiful.” Just imagine that God set his love on us as adult men, not because we are beautiful or strong, but because he chooses us when we are unlovely, as we waddle in the swamp of sin.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The researcher will use St. John 5:1-15 as the biblical foundation text. The text presents a contrast between Jesus and the man who has been ill for thirty-eight years. The encounter Jesus had with the man at the pool of Bethesda introduces a new setting, distinct from the last in John 4:43-54. According to F. Lozado in his book called The Literary Reading of John 5, "Jesus, the Galileans, a royal official, the official's slaves, and the official's household. In John 5, we have Jesus himself, a multitude of sick people, and a particular sick man at the pool (cf. Jn. 5:1-9a".[1] John 5:1 marks the beginning of this new context, and it ends in John 5:47. John 5:1-47 is a unified episode: John 5:1-18 connects the healing story of the man at the pool with the Sabbath story, and John 5:19-47 is a discourse or response to John 5:1-18. The healing of the lame man is the third miracle of John, with the first two miracles being the changing of water into wine and the healing of the official's son in Capernaum.

This gospel message in John 5:1-15 to wounded people is the healing balm needed to bring fundamental transformation to every area of their lives. Everyone is subject to being wounded psychologically, physically, emotionally, and socially; the question is how we treat those wounds when they occur. Though all the synoptic gospels

[1] Francisco Lozada, "A Literary Reading of John 5: Text as Construction (Studies in Biblical Literature" (Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2000).

are necessary for our growth as faithful followers of Jesus Christ, the writer believes the gospel of St. John is what the doctor ordered to heal the wounds of those who have been ostracized, left out, abused, abandoned, rejected, and made outcasts.

Each gospel uniquely presents Jesus without contradicting themselves. The book of St. John presents Jesus, according to *The New Interpreter's Bible,* "Jesus provides access to God in ways never before possible because the revelation of God derives from the most intimate relation with God. Jesus provides unique and unprecedented access to God because Jesus shares in God's character and identity."[2] The exposure of wounds of the adult male community to this gospel comes with a high dosage of God's expression of God's presence. As followers of Jesus Christ, as a church, we can call to our community to reach out to the voiceless, the gutter dwellers, the left out, the outcast, and the least of these. Men have never been considered to be a part of this community of outcasts because of their dominant nature. Still, the researcher believes that men are suffering just as much due to the façade of their mental stability. The text is one of those stories that depicts not only the transformation of one's life but also their response to having access to God through Jesus Christ.

According to the text, the Pool of Bethesda was a place where many who were sick, lame, blind, and disabled gathered with the hope of being healed. The belief was that an angel would occasionally stir the water, and the first person to enter the pool after that would be healed. Historians and archaeologists were unsure where the pool was located. Still, in the 19th century, a pool was discovered in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate with five porches, as the Bible describes. According to Urban C.von Wahlde's article in

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[2] Gail R. Oday, *New Interpreter Bible: John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 495.

the Biblical Archaeology Society Library, "Beginning in the 1880s, however, archaeologists discovered the remains of a pool north of the Pool of Israel, and continuing excavation ultimately exposed a rectangular pool with a wall in the middle that divided it into two. With porticoes on the four sides of the pool and on the central wall, this was indeed a "five-sided" pool."[3]

What was the significance of this healing in John at the pool? It was believed that the pool was a source of healing, and the lame man thought so much of it that he did not consider any other source, for he lay there for thirty-eight years, hoping for the opportunity to get into the pool. As Ben Witherington observes, "This story reveals the quiet desperation of people with ongoing illnesses in an age when medicine was either nonexistent or usually ineffective."[4] But did the Pool really heal? What was behind this idea that the pool held healing properties?

There is a conflict concerning the originality of the text relating to the stirring of the pool that seems to be omitted in some Bibles. We face the challenge of whether 5:3b and 4 are original. The earliest manuscripts omit 5:3b and 4, but according to Zane Hodges in his book, Problem Passage in the Gospel of John. Part 5: The Angel at Bethesda stated, "demands the presence of verse 4 in the narrative's introduction" and challenges modern textual criticism conclusions regarding this verse. He points out that

[3] Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Puzzling Pool of Bethesda: Where Jesus Cured the Crippled Man," Biblical Archaeology Society, October 2011, https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/the-puzzling-pool-of-bethesda/

[4] Ben Witherington III, John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 137.

Tertullian, writing in the early 3rd century, comments on this verse. He argues that this attestation of the verse is then equally as old as the earliest manuscripts which lack it."[5]

Where did this concept of the stirring of the pool come from, where it required the first to get in to be healed? Was this associated with the God of Israel or another god? According to Craig Koester, "these practices are not well attested in Jewish sources, which commonly connected healing with prayer to God, and the God of Israel did not reserve his favor for those who were best able to help themselves."[6] Many scholars do not believe that the idea of healing virtue of the pool was associated with the God of Israel, but rather with a Roman-Greek god called Asclepius.

According to Robin Thompson in his article in the Bulletin for Biblical Research, "According to Greek mythology, Asclepius was the son of the god Apollo and a mortal woman named Coronis. She fell in love with another mortal, and Apollo killed her but saved the unborn child, Asclepius. Apollo gave Asclepius to the centaur, Chiron, who taught him the healing arts. But when Asclepius, out of compassion, raised someone from the dead, Zeus killed him with a lightning bolt. Eventually, Zeus brought him out of Hades and made him a god. Snakes were the symbol of his healing power and were often even his agents in the healing he performed."[7]

Asclepius was supposedly the greatest healing deity among the Greek and Roman gods. Jesus' healing of the lame man on Asclepius's own turf challenged the established

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[5] Zane C. Hodges, "Problem Passage in the Gospel of John. Part 5: The Angel at Bethesda— John 5:4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no.541 (Jan.1979): 25.

[6] Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 53.

[7] Robin Thompson, "Healing at the Pool of Bethesda: A Challenge to Asclepius?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 27, no.1, (Jan. 2017):65-84.

Roman Greek understanding of healing. According to Lee M. Jefferson, in the Yale ISM review journal, it is stated that "Athanasius of Alexandria, writing in the fourth century CE, mentions that Asclepius was deified as a healer but is not comparable to Jesus, who heals not with matter such as herbs but heals mankind with his Resurrection."[8] Jesus performed miracles of healing to demonstrate his authority over life and death.

There is little information on the pool of Bethesda itself other than in the text of John 5:2. The pool of Bethesda had various meanings. Still, according to Dr. E.W.G. Masterman in the University of Chicago press journal, "Unfortunately, the name varies greatly in different manuscripts. So many variations suggest that the name was little known, and it has even been claimed that it was not a name in general use, but one given to the pool by the evangelist himself. Were this the case, then the common interpretation would be that the Greek word corresponds to an Aramaic word meaning "house of mercy."[9]

In the miracle of turning water into wine, Jesus demonstrated his power as Lord over nature. When Jesus heals the official's son, he proves his absolute power is in being Lord over life, and when he heals the lame man, he demonstrates his authority over lost power. The text does not indicate what issue this man specifically had or how he became lame. According to Emma Swai in her article "A metanarrative of disability in John 5 from the Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies, stated, "I will not use 'paralysis' to refer to the person who is healed within John 5:1-15. Paralytikos and chōlos are the

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[8] Lee M. Jefferson, The Heavenly Physician: Jesus as Healer in Early Christian Art, *The Yale ISM Review* 5.1, no. 1, (Fall 2019), https://www.ismreview.yale.edu/fall2019/the-heavenly-physician-jesus-as-healer-in-early-christian-art.

[9] E.W.G. Masterman, "The Pool of Bethesda," *The Biblical World* 25, no.2, (Feb.1905): 88.

most common terms used to reference impaired mobility in New Testament writings: they are general descriptions alluding to "paralysis" or "lameness" in some form but lack specific detail and do not provide information on how mobility is impaired. Neither term is used in John 5:1–15 to label the person with impaired mobility; the narrative only indicates that they have difficulty walking. Whilst identity first language might be preferred."[10]

Paralysis is a type of trauma of the neglect of our mental health that has kept the male from experiencing God's desire for wholeness. For this reason, they despised the male; they looked at them with condescending contempt and shame for not being able to articulate their pain and trauma. The man's view of himself has led him to feel broken, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. His self-image is tattered, ragged, and worthless. The man cannot see himself as God's creation, which he loves, but as someone to be despised, hated, and someone less than himself. The man in our text represents the adult male furthest from God because he lacks a proper view of God's compassion.

There are other assumptions in our text that everyone must be careful about, and one of these is the assumption that the sick person who was at the pool was of the Jewish community. According to Nathan Hahn and Earnest Van Eck in their article "The lame man at the pool of Bethesda: Christological and Doxological significance of Characterization in John 5 stated "The pool of βηθζαθά was also the place where invalids lay in the hope of being healed. Βηθζαθά may mean 'house of mercy," explaining the invalids' hope. The reader may assume that all the characters involved in the lame man's

[10] Emma Swai, "Metanarrative of Disability in John 5," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* 5.3 (2024), 44.

healing were part of the Jewish community. Also, the narrator projects an image of suffering sheep in the Jewish community as the invalids among πέντε στοὰς are described as τυφλῶν, χωλῶν, and ξηρῶν. However, as the alleged healing powers of the pool were probably characteristic of pagan cults, the Jewish religious leaders almost certainly disapproved of such superstition.[11]

Trauma is a common experience for all humans, and there is only one remedy for it: God's compassion. In fact, the scriptures state in Job 14:1, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." It is the fullness of trouble that accounts for our need for God's compassion to be lavished upon us. We will not leave this earth without some form of trouble or trauma that will in some way paralyze our ability to be in proper relation with God and others; in fact, we require the resistance of trouble in our lives to grow stronger as God lavishes His compassion on us. We do not become strong without resistance, just as a weightlifter does not gain strength without the resistance of weights on his or her chest and arms.

It has been taught that men do not cry, and if I fall and hurt myself, I get up, brush myself off, and move on. This alone teaches a man from a very young age to wear a mask to avoid feeling. As a young man, the researcher felt pressured to wear a mask because, compared to other boys, which made the researcher feel less than, so, suppressed all the pain from shame, rejection, and betrayal, pushing to become an overachiever. In fact, the researcher joined the Nation of Islam at seven years old to help me mask my pain. They provided writers with opportunities to train in martial arts and

[11] Nathan Hahn, Earnest Van Eck, "The Lame Man at the Pool of Bethesda: Christological and Doxological Significance of Characterisation in John 5" *Scholarly Journal* 55, no 1 (2021): DOI:10.4102/ids.v55i1.2713

sports and, ultimately, to become bodyguards (F.O.I., Fruit of Islam). They unintentionally taught the writer how to cover up the pain by providing chances to excel.

For almost fifty-five years, the researcher has suppressed the trauma of being trafficked right under my parents' noses without them knowing. The researcher spent nearly a lifetime trying to cover up that trauma. Everywhere the researcher went, there was this strong feeling that others could see what had happened, which made the researcher feel very ugly and paralyzed, never realizing the full potential available. This feeling stayed with the researcher to this day. Wearing multiple masks is harming their relationships.

Though many are vulnerable to trouble, there is a formidable ally that assists us during tough times. Jesus is the conqueror of all kinds of challenges that come into our lives. God's love is a love that is a slayer of all that paralyzes us and a present help in time of trouble, but we must allow God's compassion to embrace us, strengthen us, and heal us. There is a heavy price to be paid when people don't let the slaying power of God's love fight for our emotional health. The passage does not directly address mental health in the modern sense, but Jesus' interaction with the man offers insights into how conversations about mental health can be approached today.

The human soul has a tremendous capacity to recover in the face of trouble. According to John Eldridge in his book *Resilient: Restoring Your Weary Soul in These Turbulent Times*, in the *Face of Trouble,* "we rally and rally, and then one day we discover there's nothing left. Our soul says, I'm done, I don't want to do this anymore, as

we collapse into discouragement, depression, or just blankness of the soul."[12] Ultimately, the consequence will be that amid our service to God, many will give up and stop. This was the case with the man in our text, who appeared to have given up trying to get into the pool, eventually becoming depressed about his 38 years of trying. Many have become functional in our church leadership roles, but many will run out of gas, leaving them emotionally unhealthy while doing the Lord's work.

There is nothing worse than a functional servant who has given up. Though they may be functional in completing their work, they have lost their will to become. They give up on the purpose of the work and the author of that work. In other words, they have become weary of well-doing and well-being. It is hard to do the Lord's work when you have given up on knowing the Lord of that work. God's compassion has thoroughly slain the man in St. John chapter five. Jesus met the man at the point of his need, not with a generic sermon but a question that we all must answer: "Do you want to get well?"

The researcher is sure the man in our text has been neglecting his mental health to the point that he no longer sees how traumatic his neglect of his mental health has become. This is the case for men who neglect their mental health and completely lose sight of the danger that their past trauma has placed them and others in. The road to healing involves becoming vulnerable to the trauma that affects us, leaving it exposed to the love of God so that He can heal us. Men need to let God love them in their pain so that He can begin the healing process. This includes not only the pain of past trauma but

[12] John Eldridge, *Resilient: Restoring Your Weary Soul in These Turbulent Times in the Face of Trouble* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2022), ix.

also the trauma of neglecting our mental health for fear of what others might think about us.

It is important to pause to acknowledge the fact that, according to Ann Maria Moeller-Leimkuhler in her article "Barriers to Help-Seeking By Men: A Review of Sociocultural and Clinical Literature with Particular Reference to Depression," in the Journal of Affective Disorder stated that "The fact that men are diagnosed with depression at lower rates than women, despite their higher rates of suicide, substance use, and violent behavior, suggests that more could be done to improve the tools used to diagnose men with depression."[13] I believe that men are not vulnerable enough to say that they are depressed due to the social stigma that men do not get depressed.

In the theological world of John, John emphasizes, according to O'Day in the Interpreters Bible of John, "The theological significance of the incarnation is cogently expressed in two lines from the prologue: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[14] As you look through the entire gospel of John, John is amazed that God would dwell with us where we are. People who are sick, evil, and wicked would stoop down and spend time with us. As you go through John, you can see in Chapter Two that Jesus spends time at the wedding in Cana and ministers to them.

In John chapter three, Jesus spent time with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, showing that those in high positions are also in great need of God's presence. In Chapter Four, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the well and allows her to drink from a well that will never

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[13] Anne Maria Möller-Leimkühler, Barriers to Help-Seeking By Men: A Review of Sociocultural and Clinical Literature with Particular Reference to Depression*, Journal of Affective Disorder*: Vol. 71, no.1, pg. 1-9 September, 2002 doi:10.1016/s0165-0327(01)00379-2.

[14] Gail R. Oday, *New Interpreter Bible: John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 495.

run dry. Now, in our biblical foundation text, Jesus spends time with a man at the pool of Bethesda posing a question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Wholeness, according to Debra J. Mumford in her article Preaching Wholeness: Attending to mental health in Preaching Ministries in the Religion Journals, "Wholeness for Jesus means being in right relationship with God and in right relationship with other human beings. Wholeness can also be defined as completeness or well-being."[15]

When many are overwhelmed by God's love, we feel a sense of awe in His presence, but it also helps to walk in faith. Walking in faith cannot be done without love. It was this man's faith that enabled him to rise boldly, despite his belief in the pool's power to heal. It is an incredible thing to be so free that you are no longer paralyzed by the stigma of seeking mental health support. The recovery at the pool exemplified a subsequent act of healing following an initial restoration. In other words, the physical healing was not the only healing that took place; it was also the healing of his mental health for being lame for thirty-eight years.

The stigma surrounding mental health support for men is challenging to overcome. The researcher personally found it so hard to admit that it was preferable to admit to having cancer than to admit to having depression or suicidal thoughts. The suicidal thoughts were not a clinical issue, but rather a self-image issue because the researcher truly felt ugly and worthless. This stemmed not only from the trauma of being sexually molested almost every day as a child, but also from the rejection and betrayal experienced from relatives, girls, and women who made the researcher feel ugly.

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[15] Debra J. Mumford, "Preaching Wholeness: Attending Mental Health in Preaching Ministries." *Religions Journal,* March 25, 2.

According to Richard Carlson and Mary Chase-Ziolek, the Greek adjective hygies in the New Testament means whole, healthy, sound, complete, or characterized by well-being. In New Testament narratives, when people with physical and mental afflictions came to Jesus, he made them whole (Mt. 12:13, Mk. 5:34, Jn. 5:6, Lk. 5:31, etc.), meaning he restored them to right relationship with God and the community by forgiving their sins in addition to curing their diseases or healing their afflictions. The wholeness that Jesus enabled people to experience was not only about helping them achieve physical or mental health. Instead, it was about mending broken relationships and restoring a general sense of well-being. Before being made whole, those with physical and mental afflictions were marginalized or forced to live outside of their communities. After their encounters with Jesus, they were able to return to full communion. Therefore, preaching wholeness means developing sermons that help people achieve a general sense of well-being or be restored to right/good relationships with God, other people, the environment, and all of God's creations.[16]

When Jesus approached the man at the pool, Jesus was like any other stranger to him who had walked by him in his thirty-eight years, having been at the pool of Bethesda. His response seems to say, "Of course, why would I be here if I didn't?" Maybe he is a little agitated by the question because he's tired, and the question seems to imply that somehow it is his fault that he is ill, like he is responsible for this illness that has plagued him. Maybe he is defensive because here is a man he does not know and has never met, asking him a question so obvious it is offensive. Personally, the researcher can

[16] Richard W. Carlson and Mary Chase-Ziolek, "Wholeness: Rhythms of Intimacy and Health." *Covenant Quarterly*, 64.1 (2006): 274.

relate to the feeling that it is my fault for my mental health issues and that others feel the same way about me as well.

When the writer first read the text it sounded like the man was describing his situation, but now the researcher can see how he can be a little offended by the question, because the writer has both physical and mental health issues and have been seeking help with doctors, and therapist for so long that he felt alone and that no one really wanted to help. The man at the pool has been on a journey of seeking healing for 38 years. The writer has been on a quest for help for the last five years, seeking help for something that had been neglected for almost fifty-five years.

For the man at the pool, Jesus is just a stranger who is likely to treat him like everyone else has. This man is used to people's judgment, being ignored, and misunderstood. This is the stigma that every male adult faces, and that is the fear that they would be judged, seen as weak, unspiritual, and worthless. It is easy to feel alone because it is difficult to find someone who understands the need for mental health support and is willing to walk alongside you. You struggle to change your frame of reference and your standards for your lifestyle so that you don't fall into the trap of believing that because you can't do things, you're giving up.

Neglecting our mental health issues has a way of knocking the wind out of you, causing you to express it in different ways. Some people faint, some cry out, some isolate, and others might even involuntarily release bodily fluids. No matter how you express having the wind knocked out of you, it is no fun. Just as the disciples discovered when they had the wind knocked out of them upon witnessing Jesus's crucifixion, they never saw it coming; even though Jesus warned them this would happen, it was not how

they envisioned the ending of His ministry on earth. What do you do when life presents you with a scenario that challenges everything you imagined and believed for your entire life? The disciples faced this very situation, so they decided to run and hide in a room, locking the door behind them. After witnessing what happened to Jesus, fear gripped their hearts and knocked the wind out of them. You can only imagine how startling it must have been when Jesus appeared in the room with them, saying Peace be with you.

Men have grown accustomed to having the wind knocked out of them, never knowing what it is like to breathe in the love of God truly. Without the experience of breathing in God's love, men will not understand what it is like to exhale true worship. Many men have become used to adjusting to the stigma and shame of seeking mental health support. As a pastor, the writer felt like the disciple locked in that room, afraid to come out because of others' expectations, but everyone knows a pastor is not allowed to get depressed, or worse, suicidal. The researcher was in pain, but never allowed to own it for the sake of the congregation. Unfortunately, our congregations are not so willing to show grace and will enable the pastor to be vulnerable enough to expose his wounds without implying he is all washed up.

John 20:19-23 recounts this divine encounter. The researcher loves that Jesus appears just when we need Him most, not with condemnation, but with His peace. The disciples, like many of us, did not respond to their fears admirably, but Jesus arrived with words of peace and hope. "Peace be unto you" is a declaration of peace to us, not to our situation. God is more interested in our position of peace than in our circumstances. All of us will face troubles in this life, and we need to structure our prayer life to help us walk on our troubled waters rather than simply asking God to be a bridge over them.

There is nothing wrong with asking God to be our bridge over troubled waters at the beginning of our journey, but we must eventually mature to walk on our own troubled waters, as Peter did (Mt. 14:22-33).

This encounter is the experience of every one of us; the only question is whether all can recognize the opportunity that Jesus is giving us to breathe again. Men are often overlooked in this part of our encounter with Him because we are so focused on the trauma of the moment and its aftershock, which is always present, that breathing does not cross our minds until we find ourselves passed out on the ground. Like the disciples, we sometimes huddle in the room of our hearts, locking the door in hopes that the aftershock will not catch up to us. For the disciples, the aftershock was the fear that what happened to Jesus could also happen to them. It is a painful experience to corner ourselves, holding our breath and locking the door behind us, while our minds are paralyzed by the fear of the stigma that comes with seeking mental health support, especially as men.

The adult male has been traumatized for centuries, and it has caused them to suffer needlessly as the people in their lives suffer right along with them. Just as the disciples locked themselves away in the room, the adult male has been locking themselves away in the room of our fears, locking the door behind us. The aftershock of this trauma has been passed down from one generation to the next. Many men have been locked in the same room for thousands of years, never daring to come out. Jesus died and was resurrected so that we could come out of our rooms of fear. In the *Global Bible Commentary*, Anne Nasimiyu Wasike writes, “In obedience to the mission he was given by God the Father, he became a victim of repressive violence together with the

oppressed. Jesus's death was the result of his option for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed."[17]

After the man explained his predicament, Jesus responded, "Rise, take up your mat and walk." This command is like the command in Mark 2. The man, for some reason, saw the pool as his only source of healing. The command to rise implies that the man was lying on the ground helplessly. Jesus did not ask him if he could get up; it was by his authority that he commanded him to rise. There is no sign of any prerequisite for faith or its absence. Men have been neglecting their mental health, which has kept them on the ground, and it is the heart of God to come near to us to command us to rise.

The call to rise urges men to support their mental health through holistic self-care. Just as the man at the pool needed to rise, so do men struggling with mental health issues need to rise, acknowledge their mental health struggles, and begin to take steps towards healing, whether through therapy, medication, or faith. It is not enough to believe in healing; one must start to take steps towards it. When the writer reads this text, it is encouraging to know that seeking help is okay and that healing is possible. One can learn from this text that just as the paralyzed man's life changed, we as men can discover new meaning and direction as we take steps towards our healing.

It is a comfort to know that Jesus knows the pain and sorrow of all who have been traumatized in this life, and that he knows how to comfort us through the aftershocks of our traumas. Long after the traumatic event has taken place, the aftershock remains buried deep in the crevices of our hearts. It keeps us from ever recovering from the trauma that took place so many years before. What is trauma? According to Dr. Joy

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[17] Nasimryu Ann Wasike, *Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 450.

Degruy, the author of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, states that "Trauma is an injury caused by an outside, usually violent force, event, or experience. We can experience the injury physically, emotionally, psychologically, and/or spiritually."[18]

Looking at the sin of the man in our text can give the impression that somehow the trauma of the man's sin was the cause of the man's disability. John 5:14 "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" has also been understood that Jesus was saying, now that I have healed you, don't worry about the effects of sin no more because I was going to the cross so you no longer have to worry about sin, but that's not what Jesus was saying.

According to Adam Kubis in his article "The Current Debate on the Relationship between Sin and Sickness in John 5:14" in the Biblical Annals journal, stating "After examining various hypotheses regarding the meaning of sin in John 5:14, the Johannine notion of sin as unbelief is expounded as the most convincing. This sin encompasses the past, present, and future life of the healed man. Thus, contrary to the exegetical opinio communis, the cause-and-effect relationship between sin and sickness does not apply to John 5:14. In light of this explanation, the messages of John 5:14 and 9:2–3 do not contradict each other. Jesus' words in 5:14, intentionally pronounced in the temple, should be understood as an invitation to follow him in faith.

Jesus acknowledges that physical healing, but, according to Adam Kubis, his sin is connected to the healed man's past, present, and future life. The Word of God generally does not connect specific sins to physical problems; however, at times it does. There are

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[18] Degruy, *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 9.

some situations in which the Bible links a specific sin to a particular suffering, such as in Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 11:30. In the book of St. John, sin is understood as unbelief rather than as a list of specific sins. It is also understood that the sin that is committed is not necessarily done by the one who is sick or ill, but rather that person was sinned against.

According to Scott B. Rae in his article "On the Connection Between Sickness and Sin: A Commentary" in the Christian Bioethics journal, stating "Sin may impact sickness when a patient is ill, not because he or she has sinned, but because that person has been sinned against. Dangerousn in the ICU who the drunk driver hit, the victim of sexual or other forms of assault, and the person who, through negligence, was exposed to dangerous chemicals all have diseases that are the result of someone else's sin. This is common with many mental health disorders and may be a part of what the OT refers to when it describes the sins of the fathers being passed down to succeeding generations."[19]

The man's illness for thirty-eight years highlights his chronic suffering that can directly affect one's mental health. Intergenerational neglect of our mental health has traumatized men without them knowing it. The feeling of hopelessness and loneliness, which is often experienced by people who suffer from mental health issues without any support, has devastated many men's lives, leading them to think this is everyday living for men. The man by the pool has been struggling to get someone to help him into the pool for those thirty-eight years. This part of the text shows the need for the church

[19] Scott B. Rae, "On the Connection Between Sickness and Sin: A Commentary" *Christian Bioethics* 12, no. 2, (2006):151. doi:10.1080/13803600600805310.

community to be Jesus' hands and feet, helping men see that they need to get up and that staying on the ground or neglecting their mental health issues is not an option.

It is also important to note that the depiction of people with disabilities in need of healing is an oversimplification of their issue. According to Patricia Bruce in her article, John 5:1-18 the healing at the pool in the Neotestamentica: Journal of the New Testament society of Southern Africa stated that "Next I reflect on the lives of people with disabilities in the Judeo-Christian world and suggest that the dominant depiction in the NT texts of people with disabilities as those in need of healing is an oversimplification of their lives. The essay concludes that it is necessary to locate the presence of people with disabilities in the biblical narratives in positive and empowering ways."[20] Bruce highlighted a call for an ethical reading of John's gospels, especially regarding the disabled.

Looking at the man in our text, it would be fruitful to see him as Jesus saw him, rather than how people usually see the disabled. There is a vast difference between seeing a disabled person and a person who has disability. The narrative has always looked upon the man more as being disabled rather than a person who happens to be disabled. I can see how the bible can fuel the belief that able-bodied bodies are superior to disabled bodies through the focus on healing disabled persons in scripture.

According to Yahnatan Lasko article called "Disability in the world of Apostolic writings" in the Kesher, a journal of Messianic Judaism stated that:

> Jesus employs this physiognomic framework to link illness and sin in [his] warning [to] the newly healed man [in John 5:14, which] frames the man's

[20] Patricia Bruce, "John 5:1-18 The Healing at The Pool: Some Narrative, Socio-historical and Ethical Issues," *Neotestamenta*: Journal of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa 39, no 1 (January 2005): 39.

> disabling 38 year illness as a reflection of and punishment for his sinful character. The disciples do the same thing with the man born blind of chapter 9. On seeing the man, their immediate response is to ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents . . . ?" (John 9:2). Their default assumption is physiognomic. . . . On this occasion, interestingly, Jesus subverts this view of disability—perhaps in a worse way—by attributing the man's blindness to God and declaring the man to be a "sort of photo opportunity" for God's working (9:3).[21]

Lasko was quoting Besorot Carter when he questioned the appropriateness of attributing the man's disability to God. I disagree with Carter that Jesus saw the man as a photo opportunity, but it is so much more about teaching us how to glorify God in less-than-ideal ways. I view my mental health issue of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) as a ministry and not a disqualifier to be used by God. I have successfully pastored two churches, raised nine beautiful children to adulthood, remained married for forty-four years, and served our country for 15 years, representing God's love while suffering everything that comes with PTSD.

What many people are not focused on concerning the man by the pool is that Jesus saw him, not just his disability. Jesus looked past what everyone typically sees as a sad state to be in, but having a disability is a great and awesome trust that God has given us to display his light in a dark world, despite our physical and mental disability. I believe Jesus was teaching us through the man at the Pool to value every person. In our common human condition, we are prone to dismiss and disqualify people who are different, and the man at the pool had been looked over for thirty-eight years until Jesus came.

Even among those who are suffering from mental health issues, it has been falsely misread and misunderstood due to stigmas, misconceptions, and a lack of education,

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[21] Yahnatan Lasko, "Disability in the World of the Apostolic Writings," *Kesher:* A Journal of Messianic Judaism 38, (February 2021): 89.

especially in the church. The researcher is currently managing his own mental health challenges effectively. However, the primary concern does not stem from his condition, but rather from the persistent misconceptions about mental health that many individuals continue to hold. For example, many believe that people who are suffering from mental health issues are a sign of weakness. For most men, this stigma has encouraged many men never to address their own cognitive problems.

According to Katherine Cullen in her article called Five Myths About Trauma: Debunking some serious misconceptions about an increasingly popular concept says, "Trauma does not have to happen to you directly for you to experience its negative effects."[22] Many people do not have a narrative of a trauma that has happened to them, but they do have a narrative of a traumatic experience that they witnessed or even heard about. This is called Vicarious trauma or secondary trauma. Being exposed to something traumatic that you witness firsthand, whether it's in person or by watching television, can cause the same trauma symptoms as experiencing it yourself. It's essential to stay aware of what you see and hear.

Shelly Rambo's book, called Spirit and Trauma: Theology of Remaining, states that "trauma is not just an event; it's a story about the storm that does not go away. Deacon Julius Lee says that people do not want to hear this story. Instead, there is a lot of pressure to get on with it, to move to the happy ending."[23] We want to hurry up to the

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[22] Katherine Cullen, "Five Myths About Trauma: Debunking Some Serious Misconceptions About an Increasingly Popular Concept." Psychology Today, October 28, 2022, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-truth-about-exercise-addiction/202210/5-myths-about-trauma.

[23] Rambo Shelly, *Spirit and Trauma: Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 143.

Kumba ya part of the story, where everyone is getting along. This is one of the reasons why some politicians wish for black history to no longer be taught in our schools. The trauma in every story of the Bible is one no one wants to hear alone. People wish for a beautiful ending, but beautiful endings take time and intentional healing.

People keep saying to get over it; it happens, now, move on. There is a death that is not being addressed, and people must address it with the healing balm of love. Our human efforts cannot define the expression of God's love; God himself must order it, for it is his love alone. We cannot heal ourselves from the pain of trauma or the intergenerational trauma of neglect. Unfortunately, not even the church, because of its misconceptions, has been able to provide a place to bring its congregants' pain. God's love is the only appropriate response for the world, and there is a real danger in trying to heal ourselves outside of that love.

To the researcher's personal estimation, the lame man was traumatized by three things: His disability, his disappointment, and his despair. These three words have traumatized the man's perception of himself through identity confusion, loss of personal boundaries, diminished self-esteem, and chronic guilt and shame. The pool, as the lame man understood, was the source of his healing, where the angel of the Lord would come and stir the water.

According to Men's self-hatred has bound the pain of the past, disrupting our present and future. Men have struggled to love themselves as a people because of the trauma we experienced as men. This lack of love stems from our inability to forgive ourselves for allowing such atrocities to occur in our lives. Men do not only hate themselves for the suffering inflicted upon them, but also for the pain they have caused

others. The key to healing lies in our capacity to forgive ourselves. The pathways in our brains need to be rewired, renewed, refreshed, and transformed to cultivate self-love. This transformation is only possible through the love of Christ.

Lewis B. Smedes, in his book "*Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve,*" supports the power of love by saying, "Yes, love gives you the right to forgive yourself." And it gives you the power as well."[24] According to Sharon Martin in her article "The power of self-love" in the Psychology Today journal, "Self-love lays the foundation for assertiveness, establishing boundaries, nurturing healthy relationships, practicing self-care, pursuing personal interests and goals, and feeling pride in one's identity. Without self-love, we're prone to harsh self-criticism and may succumb to people-pleasing tendencies and perfectionism. We may tolerate mistreatment from others, disregard our own needs and feelings due to a lack of self-worth, and make choices that undermine our best interests."[25]

The man in this story allowed the love of Jesus to transform the pathways in his brain and heart, renewing and changing him through the experience of drinking from the Master's well of compassion, a well that never runs dry. Every person who has ever encountered Jesus has the opportunity for their brains and hearts to be renewed and changed only if they allow the love of Christ to take a walk through the pathways in their brain and heart, washing them clean from the old, stinking thinking of sin that led to the behavior of self-hatred. The root of all traumas that have been perpetrated in men's minds

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[24] Lewis B. Smeade, *Forgive and Forget* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1996), 77.

[25] Sharon Martin, "The Power Of Self-Love", Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/conquering-codependency/202306/the-power-of-self-love

is a result of a fallen world where sin abounds. Not only do we need the pathways of men's brains and hearts to be cleansed, but men also need new, healthy pathways created to replace the old ones.

According to Bessel Van Der Kolk in his book called *The Body Keeps the Score,* "Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way the mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think."[26] What men do not know concerning the man at the pool is the trauma that led to the life he was living in the text. Though we do not know his story of pain, we can be sure that whatever it was, it changed the way he saw himself and others. His perception of life and dreams was drastically changed through his trauma.

These traumas can be passed down from one generation to another, altering their perception of the future. The trauma of adult men could have been simply the trauma of many years of neglect of their mental health. DeGruy gives this powerful example of a woman who is triggered by her slave master, who had raped her in the past, commenting on her daughter's working skills and beauty. The mother is triggered by the master's comment, fearing that the master may rape or sell her daughter, so she responds by saying Naw master, she ain't worth nothin.' She can't work. She's stupid. She's shiftless."[27]

Though the mother says this to protect the daughter, the daughter does not know this, and for this reason, she thinks her mother hates her or thinks she's ugly. The mother

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[26] Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2015), 21.

[27] Degruy, *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 9.

does not want the daughter to get the idea that she is cute for fear she will portray that high self-esteem to the master. This is just one thing that can be passed on from one generation to the next. Even the boys can develop an identity crisis of what a man is when the master starts rewarding him as a Stud who helps get the women on his plantation pregnant. The black male begins to identify as being a man based on how many women you sleeps with and impregnates.

For the man at the pool, there seems to be no answer to the pain inside him, yet if we look closely enough in the text, sprouting from the black dirt of his pain was the beautiful white lily of God's love. Men generally do not notice the love; all they can see is the unhealthy view of what they define as a man. Like many men, he tends to notice the side effects of our mental health neglect and suggests that we should be ashamed of ourselves, but this man was not ashamed because the love of his life was permitting him to rise. Not only did he rise, but he also reciprocated his love by spreading the good news that Jesus had healed him.

The Book of Luke portrays women as subordinates in service, even though they are included with the disciples, subject to Jesus' teachings, and objects of his healing. In the *Women's Bible Commentary* by Jane D. Schaberg and Sharon H. Ringe states, "Warning! The Gospel of Luke is an extremely dangerous text, perhaps the most dangerous in the Bible. Because it contains a great deal of material about women that is found nowhere else in the Gospels."[28] Though the author of Luke portrays women in an

[28] Sharon H. Ringe and Jane D. Schaberg, *Woman's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 493.

insubordinate way, it would be a huge mistake to think of this insubordination as divinely ordained.

Despite this encounter, Shelly Rambo tells us, "That love will make its way through death."[29] Just as love made its way through the man's trauma, redeeming him, God's love will always find a way for us through our trauma. Men must be vulnerable to allow themselves to be rescued because the stigma of seeking out mental health has paralyzed us from being rescued. Men must create an environment where men can feel safe and comfortable seeking out help and community support for their mental health issues.

As people look at this man, something is missing that we cannot look over. The story is missing a middle. A middle that describes what it was like between the cross of his trauma and the redemption of his healing. If you were to write a resume, you would likely write it from a redemptive perspective. No one wants to hear the story of the cross, and no one wants to hear the story of the middle, either. Everybody loves a good redemptive story. Rambo states, "Redemption is such a foundational metaphor for Christianity that it often remains unquestioned and untouched. Is a reworking of one's model sufficient, or does trauma shatter the metaphor, confronting us with the shards of redemption? The vision from the middle is one of perpetual witness. Can it be contained within a redemptive framework?"[30]

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[29] Shelly, *Spirit and Trauma: Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 145.

[30] Shelly, *Spirit and Trauma*, 144.

In other words, can our story hold up in the middle, or does it fall apart? The redemptive framework of our story must be contained in the middle. A good redemptive story or framework is not afraid of the messiness of the middle. We tend to avoid covering painful realities because those realities do not provide us with the happy endings that we expect. The man at the pool gives us our happy ending, but we do not know the messiness that it took for him to get to his redemptive story. When the researcher hear people tell their redemptive story, they tend to show their stars as though there were no scars involved. This person has always come across to the researcher as either a perfect man or not being truthful.

This text of John 5:1-9 is very relevant to the plight of men suffering from intergenerational neglect of mental health. Jesus tells us in Luke 4:18-19 that "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty to those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." This is the same calling for the church and just as Jesus was moved with compassion during his ministry on earth so should our churches be moved with compassion to silent cries of men who do not know how to ask for help when they are hurting. Just as Jesus told the lame man at Bethesda, "Arise and walk" (Jn 5:8), Jesus is also telling men Arise and walk and be liberated from the chains that hold them captive, the chains that deprived men from achieving and attaining our full potential.

For example The woman in the Alabaster box story is highlight by Jennifer Garcia Bashaw saying in her article in the *Sage Journal,* "Finding Common Ground in God's Story: Experiencing Luke 7:36–50 with the First-Century Hearers," "For Luke's

audience, the reversal is dramatic, even if they already had reason to suspect this woman's motives. Jesus' words exalt the uninvited dinner guest to the position of host extraordinaire. The worldly woman crashing a dinner party has become a model for hospitality, responsive gratitude, and extravagant love."[31] At this point, the audience would be stunned at the turn of events and is now wondering what would happen next. The woman crashing a dinner party is seen as the hero of hospitality.

The question I want to wrestle with is whether the woman came into the dinner party already forgiven, or did it take place afterward. As Jesus declares the forgiveness of the two debtors, Jesus declares the woman forgiven. James R. Edward, author of The Gospel According to Luke, states, "The NIV correctly conveys that her love and gratitude were the results of her forgiveness, not the cause of it. It is Jesus, not the woman's love, who is the source of her forgiveness." 15 The transformational power of Jesus' love for her caused her to crash that dinner party feeling sinful, but now hopeful from whatever encounter she had with Him prior to the gathering.

The stigma surrounding mental health often carry feelings of shame which can be both public perception and internalize experience. The shame that men go through as result of facing their mental health issues can be devastating causing them to not seek out help, negatively impact their self-esteem, and isolation from the community. It is the writer belief that the man at the pool of Bethesda did not experience shame as result of what he did, but due to his prolonged disability. The man was placed in isolation with other sick and lame people by the pool.

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[31] Jennifer Garcia Bashaw, "Finding Common Ground in God's Story: Experiencing Luke 7:36-50 with First-Century Hearers," *Sage* 116, no. 2 (2019): 233-239.

The competition for healing to be the first in the pool also can also be reflected in societal pressure to conform to a certain timeline of healing. Men are extremely pressured to get over it, or to snap out of it. The belief of the healing properties of the pool led to people seeking out a competitive opportunity to get into the pool first. Jesus challenged this mindset of that day the healing was only given by way of getting in the pool first. Jesus healing the man emphasized that true healing comes not through competition or ritual, but through faith in him and his divine power.

The love of God does not leave anyone behind feeling shame and guilt. This man was accustomed to being left behind but not today. Love and compassion captured him and drove him to his feet. The man found himself existing solely for the purpose of worshipping Jesus, where nothing else mattered. Bishop Michael Curry's book, *Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times,* tells us that "Sometimes it's hard to feel God's love in everyday lives, especially when chaos descends. We all have responsibilities and mundane routines."[32] I am sure this was the case with the man's life, yet God's love found him, and now he is running sharing how Jesus healed him.

This is why the researcher love the scapegoat illustration found in Leviticus chapter sixteen concerning the scapegoat. The priest lays hands on the scapegoat, placing all our sins on the goat, and the goat is sent out into the wilderness. This is the illustration that helps the man to understand what Jesus did for him concerning alleviating his guilt and shame. Hebrews 9:14 reminds me that God cleanses our conscience from acts that lead to death. June Tangney and Rhonda Dearing share with us in their book, *Shame and*

[32] Michael Curry, *Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House 2020), 28.

Guilt, that they got the notion that one had to feel bad to be a good person. She says, "To be a good person, you have to feel really bad. If you're not a saint, if you occasionally, inevitably sin, then your worthiness and closeness to God hinges on how bad to feel about those sins."[33]

Tangney also says, "Good people feel intense remorse and regret, and a painful grinding self-scrutiny and denouncement of the self."[34] Being a co-dependent, the writer has come to believe that people like this is destined to be co-dependent. Since they cannot feel good about themselves, they would depend on someone else to make them feel good about themselves. What a terrible web we spin to emotionally trap ourselves.

According to Siawomir SzKredka in his article in the *Pastoral Psychology Journal* "Between Clinical and Biblical Conceptualizations of Guilt and Shame: Luke 7:36–50 as a Case Study" that there is a difference between guilt and shame that has been confirmed by many sources. He says "the difference has been empirically confirmed by multiple studies. What emerges from work conducted in psychoanalytic, clinical, social, personality, and developmental psychology is a theoretical and clinical distinction between guilt and shame."[35]

Sin is a burden that we must unburden ourselves from to be free to live out the life that is required to worship and serve our master. Shame and guilt serve one good purpose and that is to draw us to God. There is such a thing as healthy guilt and shame. It was this healthy shame that help this man see he needed Jesus to heal him. He did not

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[33] Rhonda Dearing and June Tangney, *Shame and Guilt* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2002), 1.

[34] Dearing and Tangney, *Shame and Guilt*, 1.

[35] Siawomir SzKedka, "Between Clinical and Biblical Conceptualization of Guilt and Shame," *Pastoral Psychology* 71, no. 3 (2022): 313-323.

need for someone to tell him that he needed help, he knew for himself through his guilt and shame.

Whatever caused this man to be paralyzed his encounter with Jesus healed him from not only from shame and guilt but the impact of his past concerning his life. Tangney and Dearing says "that Shame and guilt are thus both "self-conscious' and "moral" emotions: self-conscious in that they involve the self-evaluating the self, and moral in that they presumably play a key role in fostering moral behavior."[36] There was a good chance that there were a significant amount of guilt and shame for this man that manifested itself as having a victim mentality where he was so focused on his limitations and external factors that he couldn't imagine a way out.

The great theologian Paul Tillich states in *The Inner Journey* views from the Christian journey:

> Forgiveness is an answer, the divine answer to the question implied in our existence. An answer is an answer only for him who has asked, who is aware of the question. This awareness cannot be fabricated. It may be in a hidden place in our souls, covered by many strata of righteousness. It may reach our consciousness in certain moments. Or day by day, it may fill our conscious life as well as its unconscious depths and drive us to the question to which forgiveness is the answer.[37]

Tillich does not give us the question that we should ask, and the writer believe that is by design. The question will vary from one person to the next, leading to different answers. For writer, the question was born out of the brokenness in the writers soul that begged for this question to be ask, how can I be made whole?

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[36] Dearing and Tangney, *Shame and Guilt*, 2.

[37] Paul Tillich, *The Inner Journey: Views from Christian Traditions* (Sandpoint, ID: Morning Light Press 2006), 24.

Tillich also tells us that "being forgiven and being able to accept oneself are one and the same thing."[38] Filled with guilt and shame, it is impossible to accept oneself the way they are, and that is why men try so hard to fit into a world that where showing emotion is not allowed for men. Men are all only designed to fit into God's purpose for himself. This is not possible without forgiveness; forgiveness is not possible without love. When Jesus said to the man rise up, take up your bed and walk, not only did he know he was accepted, but he also was able to accept and love himself. There is no greater freedom and feeling than to be loosed from the bondage of negative perceptions of oneself. This kind of love prompts an extravagant amount of love towards the one who has given it.

Tillich tells us, "When one sees themselves as righteous, they tend to be self-assured in their righteousness. For that reason, they do not believe they need much of God's forgiveness."[39] For this reason, they love little. It is hard to give extravagant worship when you do not recognize the great gift that has been made available to you. For years, even while in ministry, the writer did not recognize the great gift of God's forgiveness, and for that reason. Was able to appreciate the gift.

As we look at our text, the writer wants to show the correlation between the unnamed man and the intergenerational trauma in the lives of the adult male. The unidentified man, for whatever reason, did not and could not accept himself. It is very hard to be accepted when you are rejected. Just like the man in our story. African Americans have found it impossible to be accepted where they are rejected. For the last

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[38] Tillich, *The Inner Journey*, 26.

[39] Tillich, *The Inner Journey*, 2.

300 years, they have been trying to fit into a world where men who show their emotions. I want to show that the same healing power of God's love and forgiveness can impact our lives as it did the man at the pool of Bethesda.

Men have been suffering from PTSD, which has not been appropriately addressed for generations. This is not an issue of adult males only but also the issue of anyone traumatized in their life. Individuals and generations of people have been traumatized to the point that it has left an indelible scar on their souls. Ever since the beginning of time, men have been traumatized, and the impact of that trauma has been passed down from one generation to the next in subtle ways. Bessel van der Kolk, in his book, *The Body Keeps the Score,* states that "Trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body."[40] These imprints can be left on every DNA in your bloodline, ready to impact the future of that generation.

For the researcher the experience of traumas during childhood, the church gave no safe space to heal. As much as the writer love the church, the writer became more hostile towards it for allowing no space for healing. The hostility was not immediately noticeable because the writer appeared to be growing in the Lord. The writer had an insatiable appetite for God's word and was fearless in sharing the gospel. The writer believes his appetite gave him a false hope that he was getting better because he was beginning to forget the trauma that took place in the past, but it was still there. The appetite for the word turned out to be a tool to suppress and bury the pain.

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[40] Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 21.

There are men who were suffering from some family trauma. In fact, literally everyone had some kind of trauma in their lives. The young researcher just assumed this was how it was. You bury it and move on. The writer was fortunate enough to survive walking through the dark in church and finding his way to a healthy, loving relationship with God, but many that in church did not survive. My survival was that I was able to find other tools to further suppress my pain. The writer wore the mask of street gangs, became a Muslim with the Nation of Islam, a three-time State Martial Artists champion for Connecticut, joined the U.S. Army, and even enrolled in seminary.

Most people remained in church but became rigid, unloving, judgmental, in other words, shallow in their faith. They were cracking from the pressure of trying to keep continue to suppress their pain, not realizing that it caused their pain to grow out of control. The pain that was experienced grew from pain to fear, from fear to being numb, from being numb to indifference, from indifference to hostility, hostility to back to being in pain. This was the cycle that many lived in for their entire lives, and it is suspected that there are many men silently going through it.

The problem was not the church but the way the have been discipling members. Every family in the church is a descendant of traumatized people—men who were severely wounded and scarred from the viciousness of intergenerational neglect. There has been a heavy dose of trauma that has been passed down from one generation to the next. Though we did not experience the same event, we can still feel the impact of the traumas that our ancestors experienced. The men of our community must face our past to move forward, but the problem is we do not know our past.

For example, in Manning Marble's book, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African American Past Can Remake America's Future,* states, "We all live history every day, but history is more than the construction of collective experiences, or the knowledge is drawn from carefully cataloged artifacts from the past. History is also the architect of a people's memory framed by our shared rituals, traditions, and notion of common sense."[41] Not knowing our past deprives us of moving from strangers to neighbors.

The church is developing a negative reputation that has called into question its usefulness and credibility. It is believe that some of the negative reputation stems from YouTube posting numerous church fights online, and these are only the ones that were captured on camera. There is a great need for the church to be more aggressive in dealing with the shallowness of discipleship that is directly connected to the trauma of sin and indirectly to our family traumas. Just as the man in our text has been traumatized, Jesus will address that trauma with his love. We want to be aggressive not only with the message of love but also with the actions of love. Only love is the answer to what the world needs today.

It is the researchers desire to see the men in our churches and the world around us healed from intergenerational trauma that is passed down from one generation to the next. It is believed that our churches are suffering from emotionally unstable people, especially among our leaders. Jesus said that we would do greater works than he did, and that includes healing the traumatized. Our churches are made of families who are traumatized

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[41] Manning Marble, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (New York, NY: Perseus Books Group, 2006), 1.

by the original trauma of men suffering from intergenerational trauma of neglect. Let the church be more like the man at the pool by getting up , picking up our mat and walk.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Freedmen's Bureau's support for the African American community during the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. This period was supposed to bring hope and change for the African American former slaves with the help of the Freedmen's Bureau, but it only served as a band-aid for the massive hemorrhage that slavery had left on the souls of these former slaves. The freeing of the slaves was a blessing on one hand, and a curse on the other, ~~for~~ the former slaves had nowhere to go or any idea how they were to enjoy their newfound freedom.

This is the case with men; however, men did not have a Freedmen’s Bureau to help them adjust to their manhood. They had many support options that functioned more like band-aids. While the Freedmen’s Bureau served a purpose in one respect, it neglected the larger issue facing the enslaved people: their mental health. Men engaged in various activities to help them cope with their manhood, but this ultimately overlooked the need for mental health support.

Though the Freedmen's Bureau focused on meeting the physical needs of the newly freed slaves, it fell short in addressing their emotional and spiritual needs, which would plague the African American community for the next 158 years. According to Martin

Abbott, the author of *The Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina 1865-1872* states, "Freedom in most ways was a vague and elusive thing for the ex-slave of South Carolina, but in one respect at least, it took on a real and concrete meaning. That was the matter of owning the land."[1]

Though this was concrete, the lack of freedom in the souls of the ex-slaves meant that any real physical ownership would be short-lived. Not only the ex-slaves but also the slave masters who oppressed them faced this reality. From the moment the enslaved people stepped onto the shores of America, they have labored to recover from the dehumanization of bondage, Jim Crow, and ravaging poverty. Today, there exists an unaddressed trauma of chattel slavery that has been passed down from one generation to the next in the Black community. On the surface, it may appear that the ex-slaves have their needs met by the Freedmen's Bureau, but the chains of their souls remain unbroken.

The newly freed slaves were still bound to their masters and the institution of slavery. It was dangerous to be a former slave still in the South. Many of the former slaves had to find ways to survive the deliberate violence in the South with no real protection. Dale Kretz, the author of *Administering Freedom: The State of Emancipation after the Freedmen's Bureau,* says, "Freed people exchanged labor and loyalty for protection. This dynamic alliance, animated as it was by shared interests, formed the essential foundation of citizenship for thousands of black southerners."[2]

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[1] Martin Abott, *The Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina 1865-1872* (Durham, NC: North Carolina Press, 1967), 105.

[2] Dale Kretz, *Administering Freedom: The State of Emancipation after the Freedmen's Bureau* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 3.

This chapter does not aim to dismiss the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau in assisting newly freed slaves but rather to highlight that these efforts were inadequate in restoring wholeness and healing to a community that suffered under the most brutal slave system known to man. The goal of this chapter is to explore the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, its original purpose, and how it laid the foundation for ongoing support to the African American community today. Most importantly, it addresses the enduring impact of slavery that continues to traumatize African Americans. In addition, it highlights the reasons for the Freedmen's Bureau's failure to assist newly freed slaves in transitioning to a life of freedom. Four areas contributed to the failure of the Freedmen's Bureau. The Bureau's failure was due to a distorted view of ourselves as a nation. The lack of manpower and funding for the Freedmen's Bureau to fulfill its mission was a significant hindrance to its effectiveness. It was the politics surrounding the Reconstruction period that worked against the Freedmen's Bureau. The services that will be provided to the newly freed slaves through the Freedmen's Bureau will not be sufficient to help nurture them. These four factors contribute to the downfall of the Freedmen's Bureau. They also affect any future assistance for the Black community.

Summing up the chapter by connecting this Freedmen's Bureau movement to what truly sets people free. This project focuses on how to serve the community by providing not only for the physical needs of the community but also for mental health, to bring spiritual healing to the intergenerational trauma created through slavery. The researcher wants to address the trauma through the healing balm of becoming aware of one's mental health, which extends beyond the physical needs of the body and reaches

the very soul of anyone who receives it. That is, a project that will pick up from where the Freedmen's Bureau left off and begin to address the need for mental health awareness and how the church can work together to be an expression of that support within our community.

Body

According to Isabel Wilkerson in her book *Caste*, "American slavery, which lasted from 1619 to 1865, was not the slavery of ancient Greece or the illicit sex slavery of today."[3] With the end of slavery after the Civil War, although the slaves were free, they were still in bondage in their minds; even though they were free to live their lives as free men or women, the invisible caste system of the Reconstruction period insisted that the former slaves remain in their place. Wilkerson continues to point out that "The institution of slavery has left a crippling distortion of human relationships where people on one side were made to perform the role of subservience and to sublimate whatever innate talents or intelligence they might have had."[4]

The adult male who has been supporting himself through a wide variety of resources to help him with his trauma has failed to provide real mental health support like the Freedmen's Bureau. Men have coped by suppressing their pain, just moving on without addressing the trauma. Over time, the longer a male goes without mental health support, the worse the trauma becomes. The Freedmen's Bureau has served to meet the

[3] Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent,* 44.

[4] Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origin of Our Disconten*t, 15.

slaves' physical and legal needs, but for the male dealing with serious trauma, supporting physical needs without addressing emotional needs has significantly weakened men.

The liberated slaves were not the only ones being crippled; our white counterparts were also marked by a DNA imprint of superiority. Today, Wilkerson likened us to homeowners who have inherited a house that looks good on the outside but is full of leaks, cracks, and contaminated soil in its foundation. Wilkerson states, "We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. And any further deterioration is, in fact, in our hands."[5] So, it is fruitless to say I had nothing to do with how it all started. It is fruitless to say I have nothing to do with the sins of our past.

Trauma in men is inherited across generations, much like inheriting a house with existing damage—we weren't there when the harm began. Nevertheless, we have become heirs to the trauma of the past. This trauma encompasses not only certain negative events in the lives of men but also the consequences of neglecting our mental health. The Freedmen's Bureau served as external support for the slaves; however, for men, the development of mental health support must begin with our recognition that the house we have inherited is damaged.

According to George Bentley in his book called *The History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, "immediately after the civil war the question was raised concerning the newly freed slaves asking, 'What will we do with the negroes?' by General Alvin P. Hovey finding at least 500 of newly freed slaves crowding the borders of Helena Arkansas in the

[5] Wilkerson, *Caste*: *The Origin of Our Discontent*, 22.

woods."[6] The question concerning men is somewhat the same, what will we do with the men who refuses to address their mental health. Men are notoriously known for ignoring their mental health. This is problematic to not only men but all people in general.

The aftermath of the Civil War has left the newly freed slaves in great need of direction and assistance, which the government either did not consider or at least did not think was important. The answer to that question can be found in the organization described in Bruce Baker's essay titled "Freedmen's Bureau (Critical Documentary Essay)," also known as the United States Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandon Lands, whose purpose was "taking care of the black slaves and the poor whites that lived in the south after the civil war."[7]

Prior to the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, there were pockets of temporary fixes that did not adequately address the needs of the newly freed slaves. According to Bentley, "The members of the Thirty-eighth Congress was gathering for their first session, freedmen's aid societies in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati pooled their efforts wrote a letter to President Lincoln. In it, they fervently urged Lincoln to interpose with Congress and advocate the immediate creation of a bureau of emancipation."[8] The challenges of taking care of the massive crowds of wandering former slaves were just too much for the private agencies to handle alone.

Initially, it was the support of private agencies working to assist the former slaves, but the tasks have proven to be well beyond their capabilities. They also recognized that

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[6] George Bentley, *The History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 44.

[7] Bruce E. Baker, *Freedmen's Bureau* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 87.

[8] Bently, *The History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 23.

they lacked civil backing to ensure the safety and care of the former slaves. This could only be accomplished by the government, utilizing its resources to help former slaves transition to their new life of freedom. There were numerous challenges that would hinder the former slaves' transition into their new lives, such as obtaining an education, finding the means to make a living, and securing a place to call their own. They wanted President Abraham Lincoln to understand that he had not fulfilled his full duty in emancipating the slaves. These former slaves will need tools to successfully transition to their new liberty.

The Freedmen's Bureau faced many obstacles in supporting the newly freed slaves, including opposition from our government and President. These factors undermined the Bureau's success, much like how certain influences can hinder adult men from managing their mental health. Challenges such as social stigma, reluctance to discuss issues, and downplaying symptoms contribute to this struggle. Men are far less likely to seek mental health support because of these same barriers.

This had to be tough for newly freed slaves to survive with nothing to their name and face the hostility of the Southern culture, which did not want to see them freed. The Freedmen's Bureau provided some relief to a certain degree, but according to Donna Lee Dickerson's book, *The Reconstruction Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1865 to 1877*, it stated that "As the first social welfare bureaucracy established by the federal government, the Freedmen's Bureau was an example of the expanding role in the federal government into the affairs of the states."[9]

[9] Donna Lee Dickerson, *The Reconstruction Era: Primary Documents on Events From 1865 to 1877* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 29.

It was a concern that without these tools, these former slaves would begin to feel that their newfound liberty was more of a burden than freedom. Without these tools, the former slaves would always find their way back to their former slave masters, and the chains that once bound them would seem more appealing. Lavonne Jackson Leslie, PhD, has written a beautiful book about the experiences of former slaves in their transition from slavery to freedom. The book is titled "*Freedom After Slavery: The Black Experience and the Freedmen's Bureau in Reconstruction Texas*." The personal testimonies of former slaves are very enlightening, providing firsthand knowledge about the kind of impact the Freedmen's Bureau had on them if any at all.

The former slaves had to face all kinds of intimidation to prevent them from reporting the injustices launched against them. According to William A. Blair in his book, *The Record of Murders and Outrages: Racial Violence and the Fight Over Truth at the Dawn of Reconstruction*, stating, "White supremacists resented the Freedmen's Bureau in their communities and used all forms of intimidation, including murder, to prevent African Americans from testifying about the injustice they faced."[10] Freed people encountered a law enforcement system stacked against them and civil courts that failed to prosecute the criminals who perpetrated acts against them. As a result, former slaves were reluctant to report crimes against them.

Lavonne Jackson stated, "Most of the freed people encountered freedom without any belongings. Slaves such as Minerva Bendy had masters who turned them loose in the woods to face hard times. They did not know what to do when former masters made them

[10] William Blair, *The Record of Murders and Outrage: Racial Violence and the Fight over Truth at the Dawn of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 3.

leave the plantation."[11] Freeing the slaves was not going to be enough if they were to survive the cruelty of the Ku Klux Klan and the social stigmas that plagued them. For the former slaves, this newfound freedom was a culture shock, and, in some ways, it became more of a nightmare because there was no exiting plan for the former slaves in place before their release. Many former slaves made the decision to stay with their slave masters for protection from the violence of the Klan and starvation.

President Lincoln's first response to aid the newly freed slaves was to "colonize them outside the United States in Grenada and Haiti." Grenada refused, but Haiti accepted by taking in 453 former slaves. However, due to hardships in Haiti, approximately 365 slaves were brought back to the United States.[12] President Lincoln was not optimistic about the idea of former slaves and whites coexisting with one another. This was the reason why he wanted to try colonization in another country.

Lincoln's next option:

> Was to spread the newly freed slaves across the United States, hoping that this would relieve the need for federal government support, as jobs were plentiful after the Civil War. However, this plan fell through due to the hostility of white workers who did not want to work with black former slaves. Additionally, mobs would run off any former slaves looking for work. Worst yet, there were states like Missouri and Tennessee that prohibited any former slaves from migrating into their state.[13]

For the most part, former slaves were turned away from both Northern and Southern states for various reasons. Certain states, like Ohio, would only allow a limited number to enter their state.

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[11] Lesslie Lavonne Jackson, *Freedom after Slavery: The Black Experience and the Freedmen's Bureau* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing 2012), 5.

[12] Jackson, *Freedom After Slavery*, 9.

[13] Bently, *The History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 18.

"Another option was presented that seems to be successful in placing former slaves in the Armed Forces."[14] This was also a temporary fix that would only last until the end of the war. Placing Negroes in the armed forces met with great resistance.

The Freedmen's Bureau was established in March 1865 to assist impoverished whites and former slaves. The bureau helped resolve contract disputes, develop schools, provide food, and issue marriage certificates. General Oliver O. Howard became the first commissioner of the Bureau. Originally designed to last only one year, the Bureau was renewed in 1866 despite significant opposition, including the veto of President Andrew Johnson.

General Oliver was very aware and concerned about the welfare of the slaves, especially the most vulnerable such as women and children. He was troubled not only by the brutalities of the Klan but also by the opposition from ex-Confederates. The Bureau was committed to protecting them not only from violence but also in their pursuit of justice. This would prove challenging because former slaves had been conditioned not to retaliate, primarily because they had no rights at all. Within the Bureau's court system, the federal government would intervene to protect civil and property rights.

Protecting former slaves from a world where they lack a sense of belonging will only worsen. The twelve years of the Reconstruction period, which provided the first taste of any semblance of freedom, dissolved in 1877 when the Federal Government abandoned the liberated slaves and left them in the hands of those who enslaved them. All those ex-Confederates and white supremacist groups will begin to express their hostility towards the liberated slaves with violence to restore their dominant position in the American caste

[14] Jackson, *Freedom After Slavery*, 49.

system. “The new liberated slaves will once again begin a journey in longest running play where the black codes and Jim Crow will play a major role in ensuring that the former slave will be caste in the play of subordinate for generations to come.”[15]

The freed women were the most vulnerable to assault and rape. Their vulnerability stemmed primarily from being black and secondarily from being a woman. Neither of these attributes held any value during this period. Lavonne Jackson Leslie stated that “African American women often fought a losing battle against white men and women who violated them due to restrictions placed upon them.”[16] The lack of understanding of the meaning of the word freedom, combined with not having the same rights as men, left women in a precarious position.

The biggest problem that the former slaves faced after the Civil War was the morally superior attitude that the nation developed over other nations, which led to the distortion of our domestic history regarding the harsh reality of slavery. In George F. Kennan’s book *American Diplomacy*, he states concerning these attitudes, “They work an abuse on an informed understanding of our past.”[17] It will be these morally superior attitudes that will help develop the false celebratory character of Americans towards our nation's history.

These attitudes will have deep roots in our nation’s character, contributing to the dumbing down of the ugliness of slavery and the responsibility for the healing of these former slaves. Examples of a nation desiring to console itself by distorting our nation’s

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[15] Wilkerson, *Caste,* 15.

[16] Jackson*, Freedom After Slavery*, 33.

[17] George F. Kennan*, American Diplomacy* (Chicago, IL. University of Chicago Press, 1984), 4.

understanding of the Civil War era and slavery can be seen in Paul D. Escott's book called *What Shall We Do with the Negro*? Escott states that "President Woodrow Wilson viewed himself as a reformer even though he extended segregation into the Federal bureaucracy. Still, he was bent on correcting economic wrongs; he used history to argue that the United States was different from, better than, other societies."[18]

Escrott continues to point out, "Generations of political candidates and officeholders have echoed the patriotic rhetoric of American exceptionalism, which gained further strength from the nation's increasing economic and military power and the arrival of millions of hopeful immigrants."[19] Our nation has been on a long quest to exalt its patriotic image rather than face the reality of our societal shortcomings in the traumatization of slaves. The presidential slogan of President Donald Trump in the 2016 election, "Make America Great Again," has contributed significantly to perpetuating America's reluctance to conduct a factual appraisal of its nation's history.

Because adult males refuse to face their need for mental health, they also sensationalize how well they are doing to avoid confronting the reality that they are broken. Men refuse to acknowledge our shortcomings just as our nation refuses to face its deficiencies. Just as America has been on a long quest to exalt its patriotic ideals, so too are men, clearly broken by the traumas in their lives, on a long quest to maintain an image that they are okay. The Freedmen's Bureau has created the illusion of help when, in reality, it falls far below the standard of true assistance for the enslaved.

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[18] Paul D. Escrott, *What Shall We Do With the Negro?* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 8.

[19] Escrott, *What Shall We Do With the Negro?,* 8.

This continued distortion of our nation's history threatens the future of race relations and the prospects for former slaves and their descendants in this country. There is a saying, the origin of which I am not familiar with, that states, "You cannot fix what you will not face." The Freedmen's Bureau was birthed from this distortion of our history. One distortion was that the Civil War was about emancipating the slaves. The truth was Abraham Lincoln stated clearly "That he did not intend to destroy slavery and had claimed no right to do so; he wanted only to limit its enlargement."[20] Freeing the slaves was never on the agenda; it was an unexpected addendum to the war. The Freedmen's Bureau was birthed out of Lincoln's desire not only to restore the government but also to ensure that our nation would be known for its charity.

Our nation, even among African Americans, has, for the most of our history, come to believe the distorted view of our great Emancipator's desire to free the slaves when the truth is that Lincoln never intended to free the slaves. In fact, he was willing to go as far as to ensure that the institution of slavery would never be interfered with by the Federal government, according to Escrott.[21] Although Lincoln embarked upon a course of reconciliation, it really did not include the former slaves.

We must now examine the second reason why the Freedmen's Bureau failed: the lack of funds and manpower that the Bureau sought to address. "There were several reasons for this, and one of those reasons is that at the time the economy was down especially in the South, because with the halt of the slave trade the plantations had no

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[20] Escrott, *What Shall We Do with the Negro?*, 9.

[21] Escrott, *What Shall We Do with the Negro?*, 9.

more free labor."[22] Corruption was also another cause for the lack of funds and manpower. "Most of the agents who worked for the Bureau were corrupt either by stealing or undermining the Bureau. This will be the major cause of the Bureau's downfall, allowing the fox to get into the henhouse. It was said that at its highest peak the Bureau had 900 agents in their employ, but even if everyone was upstanding in their duties, they still could not cover four million slaves in need of attention all over the country."[23]

The third reason for the failure of the Freedmen's Bureau was the politics that surrounded the Reconstruction period. For example, the term "freedom" was never clearly defined in its meaning or practice. This presented a challenge for the Bureau's agents trying to protect and ensure the freedom of former slaves without having a clear understanding of what freedom meant. Each agent had their own definition of freedom, which caused confusion for both the agents and the Negro. Though President Lincoln, by the stroke of his pen, freed the slaves, the prevailing climate, including the political atmosphere, continued to view the newly freed slaves as inferior. This will ultimately be the reason why the Bureau failed to protect the former slaves' political and economic rights.

"The Freedmen's Bureau was always up against the ropes politically, taking a pounding from politicians that still existed that wanted the pre-civil war days back."[24] Though in the beginning, the private agencies supporting the former slaves severely

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[22] Bruce E. Baker, *Freedmen's Bureau* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 12.

[23] Baker, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 7.

[24] Baker, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 12.

underestimated the work that would be involved, they also underestimated the challenges they would face, even with government support. The one-year goal of the Freedmen's Bureau serves as an example of naivety in addressing the needs of the former slaves. After the assassination of President Lincoln, a slow downward spiral began regarding the legal freedom of the former slaves. Robert C. Lieberman stated in his book *Social Science History,* "After 1877, while southern blacks retained their legal freedom, they were gradually disenfranchised and remained tied to the land in a repressive system of tenancy and crop liens that differed little from slavery except in name."[25] This does not mean that the Freedmen's Bureau did not accomplish anything; despite the odds, they were able to complete specific tasks such as providing or organizing an educational system, preventing starvation, and protecting civic rights. However, these tasks were only part of the bureaucracy, and the accomplishments themselves do not make the Bureau appear to be a complete failure, as many have thought it was.

One of the leading opponents of the Freemen's Bureau was President Andrew Johnson. President Johnson dedicated himself to undermining the Bureau's efforts to meet the needs of former slaves, primarily because he felt that the Freemen's Bureau was obstructing his Reconstruction plan. Ironically, despite President Johnson vetoing every request from the Bureau, it experienced some of its greatest victories. These victories were partly due to Congress's vision of Reconstruction, which included the Freemen's

[25] Robert Lieberman, *Social Science History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 19.

Bureau, while President Johnson wanted it dismantled. Unfortunately, the Freemen's Bureau was out of operation long before Reconstruction ended in 1877.[26]

Finally, the fourth reason for the failure of the Freedmen's Bureau was that the service they were providing was insufficient to sustain former slaves through the emotional trauma they endured from their previous life of slavery. In Toni Morrison's book *Beloved,* she addresses "the trauma of slavery in the figures of a dead child whose ghost returned to tell us about the past."[27] Morrison understood that the wounds suffered by slaves from a cycle of violence played out across generations does not just go away.

I believe that ignoring the mental health of the former slaves by the Freedmen's Bureau was primarily due to their prioritizing the greatest need of these former slaves, which was food, shelter, and protection from violence. These were their immediate needs that needed to be addressed before anything else. It was not that their mental health was unimportant or did not warrant attention, but rather that their physical condition was in grave danger. I believe that the Freedmen's Bureau would have addressed this issue had it had more time and a more favorable racial climate.

I believe that the Freedmen's Bureau would have eventually concluded that caring for the former slaves was too much to bear, which led to the dismantling of the Bureau. This prompted an investigation into the qualifications of those officiating in the Bureau to determine whether it was indeed too much to handle. Questions arose about their qualifications, sparking considerable public debate over their suitability.

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[26] Lieberman, *Social Science History*, 24.

[27] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York, NY: Penguin House, 1987), 5.

According to Christopher B. Bean in his book *Too Much to Bear: The Struggle and Failure of the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas*, "Did these men have military experience or were they civilians? What occupations did the Bureau draw from? The answers to these questions will help us understand which Bureau officials were believed to be qualified or not to oversee the freed people's transition to freedom. A brief chronicling of the image of the Bureau's agent is in order."[28]

In Dr. Joy DeGruy's book called *The Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* she states:

> Since the time of Black America has labored to recover from the dehumanization of bondage, the offenses of peonage, the outrage of the black codes, the affront of convict leasing, the indignities of Jim Crow, and the ravages of poverty. During the same time, while white America has struggled to grapple with its legacy of chattel slavery and other crimes it committed in the name of morality, progress, and supremacy.[29]

Our nation has inherited a group of people who have been traumatized by their own hands and have refused to fix what they broke.

Today, many African Americans are still feeling the trauma of the slave trade that their ancestors had to endure. The Freedmen's Bureau did not anticipate intergenerational trauma, and many similar programs today still overlook mental health needs. The Freedmen's Bureau served its purpose. The trauma of the slaves was not just a historical event but also an authentic experience that slaves endured that impacted their lives in every way.

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[28] Christopher B. Bean, *Too Much to Bear: The Struggle and Failure of the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press 2016), 13.

[29] Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,* 7.

During a time when the former slaves needed them the most, it is now time for use the church to provide the kind of healing that ministers to a person's soul in the face of trauma. What is trauma? Dr. DeGuy defines trauma as "is an injury caused outside, usually violent force, event or experience. We can experience injury in physical, emotional, psychological, and or spiritual ways. Trauma can upset our equilibrium and well-being if trauma is severe enough." Trauma can also impact an individual's DNA, and the manifestation of the traumas experienced by prior generations can be passed along genetically to future offspring."[30] The Freedmen's Bureau's focus was to assist former slaves in transitioning not just from slavery to freedom but also with any baggage from their former life that will interfere with being productive in their new life of freedom.

The Freedmen's Bureau was officially dismantled in 1872, leaving them partially able to take care of themselves through the black code and the Jim Crow era. From its very beginning, the Bureau has made little attempt to address the mental health of this community and has continued to do so to this day. For the most part, the Bureau has been viewed as an agency of relief but not change. I must reiterate my position that this is not about bashing the Bureau, as many others have, for not accomplishing more, but rather to look back at the inspired and learn from the challenges that the Bureau faced as we move forward.

We must remember that the Freedmen's Bureau has made a herculean effort to assist black former slaves against an unprecedented responsibility in the face of a formidable foe: racism and disdain. The abuse that former slaves had to endure was not

[30] Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 9.

just physical; it penetrated the very depths of their souls. African Americans have been self-medicating our trauma rather than addressing it. For this reason, some negative behaviors have emerged from the aftermath of these traumas. For the most part, much of this negative behavior is self-inflicted.

Former slaves had developed many survival skills to help them cope with the abuse they were suffering. I read a book a few years ago called *The Cool Pose* by Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson. It is a book about the dilemma of manhood in America. "The Cool Pose is defined as a defensive mechanism to learn how to survive in a restrictive society."[31] From the first day that a black slave placed his or her foot upon the soil of America in 1619, it has been a constant and relentless performance for the mainstream audience of White America.

This defensive mechanism was developed long before the Freedmen's Bureau came along, and this mechanism continues to this day. African Americans created this mechanism to help them remain calm, emotionless, and fearless. In other words, do not let them see you sweat. "The purpose for this is that the average slave (especially a male slave), had to prepare themselves for the abuse of words and deeds of their slave master that if they react the wrong way could cost them their lives. The cool pose lets everyone know that he or she is strong and proud and that no matter what you do to me, I am a survivor."[32]

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[31] Major Richard and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemma of Black Manhood in America* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 1992), 13.

[32] Richard and Billson, *Cool Pose*, 22.

During slavery, this mechanism was necessary for survival, but today this defense mechanisms can be hazardous to our health and our existence as a people. We can no longer afford to shut down our feelings and remain emotionless as if to demonstrate that we are survivors. This form of cool pose is a way of masking that shows expressive movements on one hand and self-control on the other. This masking technique traces back to our African roots, where it helps individuals control their rage. It is hazardous to a slave's well-being if one cannot manage their temper and rage. Slave masters provide plenty of reasons daily to lash out, which is dangerous not only for the individual but also for their family.

The Freedmen's Bureau provided in their court system a defense if you have been wronged in some way, but it will be this cool pose that prevents the slave from fighting back, even in a court of law. Silence is another mechanism that has harmed the African community. There are some things that need to be said which have been kept silent for far too long. Abuse has occurred in our personal lives, families, and communities that still plague us to this day. The type of mental health service that the former slave community needed was probably not available at the time; however, even if it were, I am sure that the Freedmen's Bureau would have been hard-pressed to encourage participation in the service.

The Reconstruction era, which included the Freedmen's Bureau as part of Congress's reconstruction plan, was a significant period for Black progress. During this time, Black senators, governors, millionaires, and voters emerged. Despite past failures, the Freedmen's Bureau achieved the improbable in such a short time. Services today,

such as welfare, food stamps, affirmative action, and critical race theory, act as our modern-day Freedmen's Bureau, just as the Freedmen's Bureau safeguarded former slaves.

The researcher chose the Freedmen's Bureau in connection for the project because the researcher wanted to show and provide a service that is more holistic. The Freedmen's Bureau has provided a service that focused on the external needs of former slaves, neglecting their emotional and spiritual needs. The slave trade era left worse scars on the hearts and souls of former slaves than on their backs. There is a great need for men to step out of its comfort zone and begin the healing process, which can only be provided by being more aware of their mental health and to seek support. The damage done to us as a community cannot be legislated; it cannot be an idea created in someone's head but instead comes from the very heart of God.

The topic of the project is to show the need for mental health awareness among men. There is a need for healing among men that has been neglected for far too long. We need holistic healing that will rectify the trauma passed down through many generations. The services provided for our community are not enough to bring us to a sacred space of wholeness. The project will thread various biblical stories of real transformation and healing through mental health awareness.

Jesus is a representation of love, offering forgiveness that directly addresses the need to reconcile with God, while also calling us to live a life of righteousness. The Freedmen's Bureau has been addressing the physical needs of the former slaves, but it did absolutely nothing to break the chains in their minds and heal them from the inner wounds of their past in bondage. The former slaves needed more than just food, shelter,

and physical and civic protection; they also needed their inner scars to be healed regarding how they viewed themselves and others. The man's encounter with Jesus changed his life forever, so much so that it changed the way he saw himself, others, and God.

The Freedmen's Bureau provided a much-needed service to the community of former slaves, and even though they were free to leave the bondage of their slave master, the Bureau knew this emancipation was not going to be enough; they would need help. God has called the church to be His Freedmen's Bureau, providing assistance that goes beyond mere provision. The necessity for life is that we are called to be expressions of God's love to a world that has never known anything but slavery to sin. Just as the former slaves and those good agents of the Bureau had opposition and challenges that desired to see the former slaves back in chains, we will have our challenges and oppositions as well.

Though the Freedmen's Bureau accomplished much before it was dismantled in 1872, it fell short of fulfilling many of its promises. Mary Farmer Kaiser, in her book *Freed Women and Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation*, stated, "In the end, it cannot be questioned that the Freedmen's Bureau fell short in accomplishing all that it promised. Its activities were numerous, but to where they were incomplete. The bureau and its role in the failure of Reconstruction to take lasting bold in the South have generated much debate."[33]

[33] Mary Farmer Kaiser, *Freed Women and Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, in the Age of Emancipation* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2010), 2.

The Freedmen's Bureau had to deal with the likes of racist politicians, even a president, we face a lack of funds and manpower, as well as a nation with a false view of itself. We, as a community, must confront issues like gentrification, threats to critical race theory, and the negative portrayals of black people on television. And, of course, let us not forget the unforgettable Karon's of the world. However, our biggest challenge and opposition will be ourselves. As a community, we remain captivated by the chains of our past, which devastate us daily, whether we are aware of it or not.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Intergenerationally, the male community has been historically traumatized by intergenerational neglect of mental health that has affected every aspect of their lives. While there have been efforts to bring healing to this wounded community, they have often been like applying a band-aid to a massive hemorrhage. The wounds of adult men run much deeper than what movements, policies, programs, or any external help can offer. I want to research how the deep spiritual wounds resulting from the neglect of mental health awareness among adult males can be healed through the revelation of the love that God has for them.

In James Baldwin's book, *Giovanni's Room,* he says, "For these are all our children, we will all profit by or pay for what they become."[1] The researcher believes Baldwin was not only talking about African American children but children worldwide. We are all responsible for the welfare of all children, mind, body, and soul. In particular, our boys are taught not to seek out emotional help. On another occasion, Baldwin said that he suspects that people who could grasp the idea that they are all our children may be incapable of being moral. We will all either suffer or be destroyed for failing to acknowledge this fact.

[1] James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (New York, NY: Random House LLC, 1956), 19.

Adult men, with all the shame, rejection, abandonment, and hopelessness that have been hammered into them, will need support for their mental health. The researcher prefers John's gospel because it highlights Jesus' divinity, lordship, and love for humanity. It is this unconditional love that is extended to all people, regardless of their background or life experiences. Thus, John presents Jesus as a social activist who is concerned with the least of us, the left out and the left behind.

The theological framework being used for my project is Soteriology. This framework will be crucial to developing my project and maximizing its impact in healing the intergenerational trauma of adult men. This framework in the project will highlight the healing process within the community's body, soul, and spirit. This framework will adopt a holistic approach to promote healing. Thomas Hughson's book *Citizenship: Re-Minded by the Holy Spirit* states, "The paraclete's witness to Christ transpires as a mystagogical induction into Christ's reality."[2] The reality of Christ is freedom, healing, peace, truth, and much more. It is this reality that ministers to the whole man, bringing about total healing.

According to Emily Stetler, in her article, "Soteriology is the branch of theology dealing with the study of salvation. The term comes from the Greek soterion, 'salvation,' and is also related to soter, 'savior."[3] The study of Soteriology is a discussion of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, securing salvation for all believers. The study of salvation is deeply rooted and essential in the Christian faith; without it, we are most miserable and

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[2] Thomas Hughson, *Citizenship: Reminded by the Holy Spirit* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2001), 22.

[3] Emily Stetler, "Soteriology" Spring Nature Link, January 1, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24348-7_654.

lost. I Corinthians 15:19 says that if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are to be pitied more than anyone. Our salvation is deeply rooted in Jesus Christ, and not this life.

Many have wondered what salvation means in a biblical context. Understanding the biblical meaning of salvation is essential for your spiritual growth. Salvation is not just a concept but also a promise of hope and transformation. Salvation means being freed from sin and its consequences through repentance. According to Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast." The Holy Spirit is a vital part of salvation, not only in the initial inception but also in the process of transformation. Many lack knowledge of the Holy Spirit's role in salvation because the Spirit is the Cinderella of the Trinity.

Their lack of knowledge is not due to a lack of understanding but to a lack of interest in Systematic Theology. According to Wilson Varkey in his book *The Role of the Holy Spirit in Protestant Systematic Theology,* "Up to the fourth century, the deity of the Spirit, in contrast to that of the son, did not receive either explicit assertion or direct attack, because the Spirit did not raise a special problem in Christendom, Only the father and the son were found necessary to lead to a solution of the entire difficulty."[4] Though the early church recognized that the Spirit was part of the Trinity, they chose to ignore it as a theological topic, ultimately leaving their understanding of salvation incomplete.

A misunderstanding of salvation without the Holy Spirit, leading to incomplete

[4] Varkey, *The Role of the Holy Spirit in Protestant Systematic Theology,* 9.

Salvation is exemplified by the Freedmen's Bureau's limited support for black slaves adjusting to freedom. The misconception of many people of that day and continues to this day that now slavery is over, the trauma was over as well, but the past cannot simply be wiped away. According to Gilda Graff in his article "The intergenerational trauma of slavery and its aftermath," she stated, "Slavery did not end the trauma and shame to which blacks were subjected. What followed was Jim Crow, Lynching, Disenfranchisement, and an economic system – sharecropping and tenantry."[5] The Emancipation Proclamation was a form of salvation for the African slaves, but salvation without the Holy Spirit can lead one to believe that if my body is free, then I am free in every way. Policy cannot make one experience salvation or true freedom. Salvation is not determined by individual experience or regarded solely as a response to human challenges.

Soteriology is not just about the study of salvation but also about experiencing God's healing and deliverance. This deliverance within the study of salvation is both physical and spiritual. Healing is a very important part of soteriology because its reach beyond the consequence of sin to the healing of the mind, body and soul. The focus theory that I want to use under the heading of Soteriology is the Ransom theory. Because of sin we have all been held captive and have been in a hostage situation since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

The Ransom Theory plays off the idea of original sin brought about through the fall of man. The fall in the Garden of Eden has impacted relationships with God, man and the

[5] Gilda Graff, "The Intergenerational Trauma of Slavery and its Aftermath," *ProQuest Central Essentials* 41, no. 1 (Winter, 2014): 186.

world. What is ransom and what does that have to do with healing of the mind, body and soul? According to Nicholas Lombardo that Irenaeus of Lyons " is usually cited as the earliest writer to propose the devil's ransom interpretation in a coherent form."[6] Irenaeus wrote extensively concerning the ransom theory as we now know it where he discusses the redemption as price paid to the devil. You can see this in his Irenaeus book called *Against Heresies* in Chapter 1 book V:

> The mighty Word, and very man, who, redeeming us by His own blood in a manner consonant to reason, gave Himself as a redemption for those who had been led into captivity. And since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature, rendering us its own disciples, the Word of God, powerful in all things, and not defective with regard to His own justice, did righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it His own property, not by violent means, as the [apostasy] had obtained dominion over us at the beginning, when it insatiably snatched away what was not its own, but by means of persuasion, as became a God of counsel, who does not use violent means to obtain what He desires; so that neither should justice be infringed upon, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction. Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh.[7]

Healing is a part of salvation, and the ransom theory makes it possible through Jesus paying it all for us through being our ransom. In the Gospels of Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28, Jesus says that he came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. These two texts are central to the ransom theory of atonement. Psalms 49:7-8 presents a dilemma: "Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and never suffice." The psalmist lets us

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[6] Nicholas Lombardo, *The Father's Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 188.

[7] Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Irenaeus Of Lyons, *Against Heresies: Book V, Chapter I, in Ante-Nicene Fathers*: vol. I ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1995), 527.

know that we cannot rescue ourselves or anybody else. Jesus alone is where our hope is established.

The highest declaration of the love of God can only be understood if you understood the wrath of God. Because the love of God is manifested in that he sent his son Jesus to die as a sacrifice that satisfy the wrath of God for our sins. The pertinent question is: to whom is the debt being paid, and where are these payments directed? Many scholars dispute that the debt is paid to Satan. Gerald O' Collins states, "The NT nowhere speaks of this 'price' or 'ransom' being paid to someone (e.g. God) or to something (e.g. the law)."[8]

Origen of Alexandria (185-254 A.D.) tries to provide answers to this question and by doing so to analyze and develop scripture's teaching on the redemptive death of Christ. Origen states that the crucifixion of Christ was a ransom paid to the devil, for it was the devil who held man in captivity. Origen has been fiercely criticized for this position by many scholars by calling him an Arian, Nestorian, Pelagian, and more.

Despite so much opposition many scholars today have begun to defend Origen as a credible Catholic theologian. Some of his greatest supporters were Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Henri Crouzel. More recently, Ilaria Ramelli, Christopher Beeley, Thomas Scheck, and Benjamin Blosser, for instance. The researcher feels that Origen of Lyons position on the ransom theory should be considered for the twenty-first century.

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[8] Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 120.

For example, Origen's theological work has received praise from recent popes. In Aeterni Patris, for example, Pope Leo XIII lauded Origen for his philosophical knowledge and exegesis of scripture, saying,

> [Origen] was most learned in the teachings of the Greeks and Orientals. He published many volumes, involving great labor, which were wonderfully adapted to explain the divine writings and illustrate the sacred dogmas; which, though, as they now stand, not altogether free from error, contain nevertheless a wealth of knowledge tending to the growth and advance of natural truths.[9]

Healing from the trauma of neglecting our mental health requires counting the true emotional cost that we cannot pay. Neglecting our mental health according to the ransom theory is direct result of the original sin of the fall of man. According to Shelby Rambo, the author of *Spirit A Theology of Remaining and Trauma,* states, "The story of trauma is a story about the storm that does not go away. It is a story of remaining."[10] For example, People do not like that story; many would like to say now that I'm saved from sin, then I am saved immediately from the trauma of sin. Being delivered brings us into a place of salvation, but it the Spirit that helps in the application of salvation process to be transformed.

The trauma of sin can only be appeased through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. There are two things that should be noted about Jesus's death on the cross. First the death of Jesus Christ should be understood as the only means to satisfy the demands of God's justice and secondly that Jesus was our substitute dying a death that should have been us. In fact, Hebrews 2:14 state that when Christ died on the cross, He destroyed the

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[9] Pope Leo XIII, Aeterni Patris, paragraph 12; accessed on February 19, 2018 at http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.htm.

[10] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit, A Theology of Remaining and Trauma* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 45.

power of the evil one. Though trauma is a story that does not go away for mankind, it is through Jesus sacrifice that makes it possible for us to remain in Christ that destroys the impact of the power of sin over our lives.

The Bible uses many imageries, symbols, and metaphors to communicate its content to its readers. The word ransom is found in both Old and New Testament. The word ransom is one of the metaphors that the early church used to denote the atoning work of Christ. R.W Lyon in the Evangelical Dictionary of theology states "As a metaphor ransom commonly points to a price paid, a transaction made, to obtain the freedom of others. These ideas are supported also by such expressions as bought and price (1 Cor. 6:20) and redeem (1 Pt. 1:18-21)."[11]

It is important to look at the Old Testament use of the word ransom before looking at it in the New Testament. The idea of the word ransom is rooted in the ancient world where slaves and captured soldiers were given their freedom if the price for their freedom is paid. Lyons points out that throughout the Old Testament you can see the various aspects of the word ransom being used or implied. Such as in the book of Ruth you can see the word ransom being linked to the duties of the kinsmen within the culture. You can also see the word ransom being linked to the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt and the return of the exile (Dt. 7:5, Is. 35:10).[12]

In fact the deliverance of the Children of Israel is referred to in Exodus 6:6 and 15:13 as redemption and God as their redeemer in Psalm 78:35. Also individuals are also

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[11] R. W. Lyons, "Ransom," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 982.

[12] R. W. Lyons, "Ransom," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 983.

sometime the object of God's redemption in the Old Testament such as in Job 19:25. Job was expressing his faith in a living redeemer that will eventually deliver him. The researcher has discovered in his own life the connection of redemption and mental health awareness. Although mental health struggles are a part of the human race experience, God's redemption can offer healing, hope, and wholeness.

The concept of the word ransom in the New Testament according to John D. Harvey was linked primarily to what Christ has done for the believers (1 Cor. 1:30) and secondarily to what God will do for Israel (Lk. 1:68; 2:38; 24:21).[13] The Greek word lytron signifies a price paid to release someone, implying a liberation from a state of bondage or captivity. In the New Testament, this concept is applied to Jesus' sacrifice. Lyons stated, "In the New Testament the terms of ransom and purchase, which in other contexts suggest an economic or financial exchange, speak of the consequence (1 Cor. 7:23). The release is from judgment (Rom. 3:25-26), sin (Eph. 1:7) and death (Rom. 8:2).[14]

It is impossible to discuss salvation apart from the Spirit. According to Fred Sanders in his book, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology* stated, "God the Father did not merely inform us that he had a Son and a Spirit; rather he sent them to be among us. And the Son and the Spirit did not come to us only in order to transmit information, but to do the work of saving, with the information about their existence and

[13] John D. Harvey "Redemption," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 1114.

[14] R.W. Lyons, "Ransom," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 983.

their nature being a necessary accompaniment to their saving presence."[15] The saving presence is God's presence as a source of hope, redemption, and protection from evil. The spirit of God is a part of that answer to bring salvation to life what is provided in the Word of God for the healing of the sin sick soul.

The spirit helps us to remain in the middle of traumatic narrative with an end goal. According to Rambo, "the middle spirit is an invisible means of transport blowing between Holy Saturday and Holy Sunday."[16] The middle spirit is a helper and consoler to those it transports from Holy Saturday and Holy Sunday. This is the transformation that the Holy Spirit helps us bring about a manifestation of salvation in our day-to-day living.

The spirit is at work in the middle of our most traumatic experience, causing us to be passengers on our way to resurrection from death. Father Hans Urs Balthasar, a Swiss theologian quoted by Shelby Rambo, describes the middle spirit as a "winged creature flying over the abyss of hell."[17] The importance of the middle spirit in a sinner's life is crucial to carrying them to the other side of hopelessness to salvation. Without the spirit, we are just pretending to be healed. Pneumatology is the vehicle that gets us to salvation on the road to transformation.

One of the works of pneumatology is reconciliation. Wolfhart Pannenberg, the pneumatologist, is quoted by Wilson Varkey stating that "he believed that reconciliation was the work of the Son and Holy Spirit. It is noted that Pannenberg is one of the most

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[15] Fred Sanders, *Fountain of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 29.

[16] Rambo, *Spirit, A Theology of Remaining and Trauma*, 29.

[17] Rambo, *Spirit, A Theology of Remaining and Trauma*, 84.

notable pneumatologists in the third Millenium."[18] Since it is the spirit that produces reconciliation between God and man, the spirit, according to 1 John 4:8, and 16, causes the manifestation of love in the relationship between God and man. Humanity through the fall created a rift between themselves and God. Reconciliation is the process of God through Jesus' sacrifice to restore fellowship.

Not only does Pannenberg make a case for reconciliation through the spirit in our relationship with God, but he also highlights the importance of the spirit in the resurrection. This importance of the spirit in the resurrection is founded upon, according to Pannenberg quoted by Wilson Varkey, the "Holy Spirit is the Almighty God himself and his breath blows through all creation."[19] The Holy Spirit merges the reconciliation and the resurrection by resurrecting the relationship that was severed by sin. It is salvation that unites God and man through reconciliation and resurrection.

According to Luther, salvation is the ultimate work of the Spirit. He shares with us, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but by the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in true faith"[20] John 6:44 states "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." This is theological concept that suggest God's initiative is necessary for salvation.

I often wonder why so many people attend church Sunday after Sunday and never change. They are listening to the same word together, singing the songs of Zion together,

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[18] Varkey, *The Role of the Holy Spirit,* 281.

[19] Varkey, *The Role of the Holy Spirit,* 289.

[20] Mann, "Luther and the Holy Spirit: Why Pneumatology Still Matter," 111.

and praying together, yet they remain the same. The lack of change is due to a lack of the spirit. It is impossible to understand the scriptures without the guidance of the Spirit of God. First Corinthians 2:14 says, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”

Karl Barth is another theologian who influenced this chapter. According to Wilson Varkey’s writings on the *Role of the Holy Spirit in Protestant Systematic Theology,* Barth had one of the most influential impacts on the “transformation of continental theology in Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark and elsewhere.”[21] According to Barth, the starting point for understanding salvation is the revelation of God. Without this revelation through God’s revealed word, is not salvific faith.

According to Barth, “The word of God is the only medium that will reveal the past and future revelations, and this revelation is found only in Jesus.”[22] For Barth revelation is a relationship between the reality of God and our created world. According to 1 Corinthians 2:14, it is the spirit that allows us to understand and respond to the words that Jesus spoke. According to 1 John 5:5-12, the spirit does not stop testifying or pointing to Jesus. Barth develops his point by stating that humanity achieves the state of revealedness of God through the Spirit.[23]

In other words, the spirit prepares humanity to receive God's revelation. It is the revelation of God that brings about the resurrection of new life. Revelation of God is

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[21] Varkey, *The Role of the Holy Spirit,* 83.

[22] Varkey, *The Role of the Holy Spirit,* 98.

[23] Varkey, *The Role of the Holy Spirit,* 104.

needed for the resurrection of new life for the traumatized believer. It is the spirit that begins this process of salvific faith to those who have been scarred and wounded by the sinful nature of the world. All of humanity has been scarred by wounds of sin that have traumatized each of our lives.

The researcher would like to examine the role of ordinary theology in Soteriology. What is ordinary theology? According to Ann Christie and Jeff Astley, in their article on the Brill website, stated that ordinary theology is "under-stood as the theology and theologising of those who speak of God reflectively, but who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind.[24] This is the theology of the majority of churchgoers that is not deeply immersed in theological studies.

This definition implies that "Ordinary soteriology to mean the practical, everyday understanding and experience of salvation, particularly as it's understood by Christians who haven't received formal theological training. This ordinary soteriology has a derogatory connotation that implies that it is the usual kind, or terminally uninteresting."[25] According to Christie and Astley, it is important to understand that there is nothing wrong with being ordinary. The impact of ordinary theology on soteriology is that it influences the regular churchgoer's understanding of God's character, the nature of sin, and the role of Jesus in salvation.

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[24] Anne Christie and Jeff Astley, "Ordinary Soteriology: A Qualitative Study," Brill, January 1, 2009, https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004168886.i-408.69.

[25] Anne Christie and Jeff Astley, "Ordinary Soteriology: A Qualitative Study," Brill, January 1, 2009, https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004168886.i-408.69.

Because we have lost sight of the church's original purpose, the church has earned its reputation for harming rather than healing. What was in God's heart when he said let there be the church? According to Terry L. Cross in his book *The People of God's Presence: An Introduction to Ecclesiology* states, "Such a self-assessment requires a theological review of who the church was meant to be and how the church was meant to operate in the world. Reformation of the church must begin with penetration theological introspection before it proposes any practical solutions."[26]

The researcher will be utilizing the insights of some well-known soteriology theologians to gain this theological introspection. John Calvin (1509-1564) is the first theologian to be researched. John Calvin was chosen because his understanding of salvation occurred during a period of transition. This will require exegeting the culture, not just his understanding of salvation. The church itself was undergoing a transition, and John Calvin had to wrestle with the volatile teachings of Martin Luther. Just as it is important to exegete the culture in which this transition is taking place, it is equally important to exegete the study of salvation within that culture.

John Calvin conducted his study of the salvation during a time of transition, when the church was undergoing a reformation. According to Tadataka Maruyama in *Calvin's Ecclesiology: A Study in the History of Doctrine*, "John Calvin's understanding of the church was understood in three stages of academic, Catholic Ecclesiology, Reformed Ecclesiology, and Reformation Ecclesiology."[27] It is clear that John Calvin's

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[26] Terry L. Cross, *The People of God's Presence: An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Publishing Group, 2019), 14.

[27] Tadataka Muruyama*, Calvin Ecclesiology: Study in History of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022), 15.

understanding of the church was constantly evolving and reshaping. According to the website journal called Theology Matters, "a reformed church, always needing to be reformed," often shortened to Ecclesia semper reformanda.[28]

John Calvin, a disciple of Martin Luther, which was a preacher of the Reformed tradition. Maruyama's work on John Calvin as an ecclesiologist was no lightweight project. Muruyama makes some notable contributions to John Calvin's view on the church. "Emerging from the 1536 Institute the Catholic Ecclesiology, Calvin is looking to the reformed catholic church which will become more apparent by the 1543 Institute edition. John Calvin being influenced by Ecclesia semper reformanda, made it easier for him to gravitate towards reformation in the midst of hostile culture."[29]

John Calvin's Theology of Soteriology developed the Five Points that explain his understanding on how salvation is achieved through God's grace and human inability. These five points summarizes his understanding of the five points to the acronym called TULIP. The first is the total depravity of man. The second is the unconditional election and the third is limited atonement. The fourth is irresistible grace and the fifth is the perseverance of the saints.

In support of my project, the Lordship of Jesus will be the foundation of salvation to help bring about a healing of the trauma of those who are victims of neglecting mental health awareness. The role of the Lordship of Jesus is founded on Christ alone, who can heal the scars that trauma has left behind. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is energized by

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[28] Michael D. Bush, "Is the Reformation Ever Finished," *Theology Matters* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 11, https://www.theologymatters.com/.

[29] Muruyama, *Calvin Ecclesiology,* 24.

his love for those who make him Lord. At first glance, it seemed that Calvin supported the idea that the discipline of morality was unnecessary, but this was not the case. Calvin supported the idea that discipline of morality is the side effect of a church or a life that allows Christ to be the Lord.

The lame man at the pool of Bethesda began his journey of recognizing that nobody could heal his soul disease. Calvin's theology has made it clear that it was not this man's morals that would heal him but the Lordship of Jesus. This healing is suitable for both men and women. Calvin pointed out in Isaiah 45:14, "When he says that the Israelites shall be victorious over all the nations," this will depend on the relationship between its head (Jesus) and its members. This is only possible through the power of love. It is the goal of salvation to connect its members to its head, causing them to do what Jesus does.

Thomas Aquinas is another theologian who supports the project of bringing healing through the salvation support. According to Thomas Aquinas, the Church is essential for salvation as it's the ordinary means by which Christ's grace is applied to humanity. Thomas Aquinas was one of the greatest theologians in the Catholic Church. According to Thomas O'Meara in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, "Aquinas did not write a separate treatise on the church but yet made some contributions on the subject. Aquinas's use of the term church is "It is a congregation of the faithful, a people, a social body and Secondly, he always utilized Christ as the head of the church."[30]

[30] Thomas O'Meara, *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 305.

Lastly, Aquinas utilized this term to describe what the church does. In other words, the church was a vibrant community. This activity originated from a church as a collective body enjoying the vitality of the Holy Spirit. The power of the love of God empowers members of the church. It is this love that causes the members to believe and hope together. They also care for one another, including their enemies. "The beauty of the beauty consists chiefly in an inner life and inner acts of grace. But external activities also belong to this beauty insofar as they proceed from the interior (reality) and carefully preserve its inner beauty."[31]

According to Holger Dornemann in his article Thomas Aquinas: Soteriology as a doctrine of friendship stated that "since there is a communication between humanity and God, inasmuch as he communicates his happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Cor 1,9): "God is faithful: by whom you are called unto the fellowship of his Son." The love which is based on this communication is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of humans for God."[32]

Aquinas believed that friendship was paradigm for salvation. The concept of friendship is crucial to the understanding of Aquinas theology of salvation. According to Dornemann "Aquinas draws from Aristotle's commentary of Nichomachean Ethics where friendship centers on reciprocal of goodwill which is a mutual desire for the good

[31] O'Meara, *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, 306.

[32] Holger Dornemann, "Thomas Aquinas: Soteriology as a Doctrine of Friendship*" Marriage, Families and Spirituality 30, no.2 (2024): 286-291.https:// doi.org. 10.2143/INT.30.2.3293781*

of the other person."[33] Friendship is a reflection of God's love, and that love brings about God's salvation.

In John 15:15 "No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends," shows how the relationship from God and man shifts to a relationship of intimacy and shared understanding. Just as friends encourage and support one another, friendship with God leads to a life of obedience and flourishing. This has become the nature of the relationship between God and man. For friendship to be realized it must be believed as God's love. According to Dornemann "one can only speak of real friendship when the outwardly witnessed love is also believed by the partner transferred to the friendship with God: when a person believes God's love. Analogous to the Aristotelian understanding of friendship, faith is the last condition of friendship with God, but in this it is also the first act of friendship."[34]

Like John Calvin, Aquinas does not believe in a sinless church. Although the church is visible with all its failings, like the church of Corinth, it is filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and has a mission to further God's grace to the world. "Aquinas describes the church as a river of graces people an overflow of a fountain of Christ."[35] The body of Christ is a mixture of humanity, spiritual, and God-centered. Grace seems to be the main portion of the church. As believers, we should be receiving God's grace as well as distributing it to the world.

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[33] Holger Dornemann, "Thomas Aquinas: Soteriology as a Doctrine of Friendship" *Marriage, Families and Spirituality* 30, no.2 (2024): 286.https:// doi.org. 10.2143/INT.30.2.3293781

[34] Holger Dornemann, "Thomas Aquinas: Soteriology as a Doctrine of Friendship" Marriage, Families and Spirituality 30, no.2 (2024): 286.https:// doi.org. 10.2143/INT.30.2.3293781.

[35] O'Meara, *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas,* 306.

Aquinas helps the project by pointing out the importance of the church to be a people's graciousness. The graciousness of God's grace that has been given to them makes them grateful for His loving kindness. They are grateful because they know they are not sinless, yet He came to save them. The man in John chapter five was a man who was grateful for the grace bestowed upon him, which led his to his healing. This is the church, according to Aquinas, that we are a grateful people for having such a gracious God.

The trauma of neglecting mental health would be extensive, causing the adult male to endure a longevity impact of its effect. Unfortunately, the very thing that was supposed to bring liberty to the man was the main perpetrator; that perpetrator was the church. The same is true in the story of the man at the pool of Bethesda the very one who should have brought grace to this man was the main perpetrator, and that perpetrator was . The people who walked all around the man at the pool had no grace to give because they could not recognize the grace that was given to them. How often do we stand in judgment of others who come to our institutions looking for grace, yet they get a response of judgment?

According to Thomas F. O'Meara in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* state that "Aquinas began not with buildings or laws or with Jesus's founding words but with the human need for church. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to be the sinew to connect humanity together to be a church."[36] Why do they need the church, you might ask? They needed the church to be shown the grace of God, which the church embodies. The church is the place where those who are saved participate together in God's grace.

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[36] O'Meara, *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, 326.

The lack of mental health awareness experience in a world of uncertainty did not just traumatize them but their descendants. The trauma of neglecting our mental health was not meant to chain only the hands and feet but also their dignity, minds, ambition to have a future, and self-dignity. The man at the pool of Bethesda was also trapped by the cultural mindset of his time towards the disabled, disallowing him the dignity to have a life without wholeness. The church is the proclaimer and witness of salvation that leads to fostering discipleship and mental health awareness.

Another theologian the researcher will be utilizing is Rev. James Cone. Black liberation theology reinterprets Christian Soteriology through the lens of the experience of African Americans. James Cone reshaped soteriology as black liberation from oppression. What is Black Liberation Theology? The Rev. James Cone is the founder of Black Liberation Theology. In an interview with Terry Gross, Cone "explains the movement, which has roots in 1960s civil-rights activism and draws inspiration from both the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, as mainly a theology that sees God as concerned with the poor and the weak."[37]

According to Samuel Sey in "What is Black Liberation Theology in the Ezra Institute Black Liberation Theology," Black Liberation Theology developed as a mainstream idea within Black American churches several decades ago. However, most Black Canadians and most Black people around the world are not exposed to it. With the notable exception of South Africa because of Apartheid history, a Black Liberation Theology is a distinctly Black American framework.

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[37] James Cones*, A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 8.

Black Liberation Theology is dominant and popular in African American Churches. According to Emanuel McCall in "Black Liberation Theology: A Politics of Freedom," "Liberation Theology has had its proponent among every generation of the oppressed since the time of Moses. In the Contemporary scene, the historic oppression experienced by Third World people and Black Americans unites them in a common concern for a theology that addresses social reality."[38] In recent years, the social reality of black Americans has been challenged, and the threat of oppression is no longer a thing.

Rev. Cone defined Christian Theology as a theology of liberation. The study of God is a study of God in relation to the oppressed and the outcast. The foundation of this relationship is the liberation of the oppressed body, mind, and soul. Cone continues to say, "Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not theology."[39] It is impossible to read the Bible and not see that God is deeply concerned about our liberation. Liberation is consistent with the Gospel. Ever since the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, in Exodus, you can see God's hand orchestrating his liberation for his people.

According to Sarah Lee in her article "The politics of Black Soteriology" stated "Black Soteriology has played a significant role in shaping social justice movements, particularly in the context of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. The movement's leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr., drew heavily on their faith to inform their politics and activism. King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech, for example, is

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[38] Emmanuel McCall, "Black Liberation Theology: A Politic of Freedom," *Sage Journal* (1976): 32.

[39] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 49.

replete with biblical imagery and themes, highlighting the deep connection between faith and politics in Black Theology."[40]

Cone also states in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Fortieth Anniversary, "The resurrection-event means that God's liberating work is not only for the house of Israel but for all who are enslaved by principalities and powers."[41] This liberation is for everyone who has suffered bondage in one way or another. The resurrection event is the healing we need, which is so much deeper than just being liberated in the body; we need a holistic approach to healing that includes the mind and soul.

Another theologian is Dwight N. Hopkins. Hopkins' belief concerning Black Theology is displayed in *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*. "That the God of freedom has created African Americans to be free- to reach their full humanity without obstacles blocking the goal of becoming human beings who can freely do God's will."[42] God has provided for us, the church, the way to move from chains to freedom. It is hard trying to move towards freedom with our minds bound up with the identity of being disabled.

Hopkins provides us with another understanding of what Black Theology is by saying that it "is an effort of African American people to claim their blackness and their freedom as people of God."[43] I get tired of hearing people say that we see no difference, I

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[40] Sarah Lee, "The Politics of Black Soteriology," Number Analytics, June 16, 2025, https://www.numberanalytics.com/blog/black-soteriology-and-liberation#:~:text=The%20Politics%20of%20Black%20Soteriology,social%20justice%20and%20human%20rights.

[41] Cones*, A Black Theology of Liberation*, 19.

[42] Dwight Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 10.

[43] Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 11.

don't see color, I don't see race, but if I'm to embrace my blackness, I can't help but see my color and race, and that's okay. We spend so much time trying to blend in with one another when God has called us to stand out with our differences. The problem today is that we get penalized for showing our differences when we should celebrate them. Adult men also get penalized for showing that they hurt, just like everyone else.

For example, Hopkins goes on to tell us, "The greatest tragedy of black people is when they accept the standards of white beauty and actively avoid their black and African cultures."[44] This is the same with the adult male feeling the need to avoid their struggle with trauma to pretend that everything is okay. The adult male has been trying his whole life to blend in with what he perceives to be normal. For example, I did everything could to straighten my hair and bleach my skin. I have come to believe that education was for white folks and labor jobs (black jobs) were for black folks.

It is important to realize that the doctrine of salvation acknowledges human diversity. Diversity is hardwired in the doctrine of Soteriology in how the gospel is presented where the end game is the redemption of lost people. John writes in Revelation 7:9 "After this I looked and saw a multitude too large to count, from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." The use of every nation, tribe, people and tongue is a sweeping scope of God's redemption.

It takes a lot of guts to show up, embracing who you are with no shame and worship, though it may be unfamiliar to those around you. Pursuing my doctorate took a lot of courage for me to show up, knowing my educational history and that this might be beyond my grasp. It took a lot of guts to embrace my blackness in a school that may

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[44] Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 11.

require me to blend in like the other schools I matriculated from. It also took a lot of guts for the writer to worship God with what he had, and also with what was lacking.

The trauma of neglecting one's mental health placed them with a deficit, but they were still men. They had developed strengths over their lifetime. They used what they had to get through their years of pain that caused them to neglect their mental health and, afterward, Jim Crow Hopkins tells us that "Black Theology recognizes that God, through Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit, works with the poor as they learn to love themselves enough to practice their total freedom and create their full humanity on earth as it is in heaven."[45]

It is difficult to love oneself with the trauma of trying to hide the pain that is lying in your heart. Christ's love is that healing balm that helps us love ourselves and others as we walk in our freedom. Through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ comes the love of Christ as our liberator. The liberator has provided a pathway for the journey of faith to fully embrace our freedom.

[45] Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 12.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The project will explore helping men to foster mental health awareness due to intergenerational neglect among descendants of adult males. For example, according to Dr. Joy Degruy in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, "Recent research in the field of epigenetics has revealed that trauma can actually impact an individual's DNA, and the manifestation of the traumas experienced by prior generations can be passed along genetically to future offspring."[1] There has not been any real study on how to heal the descendants from a trauma they did not experience. To underpin the project, the researcher aims to draw on the discipline of education to aid both the understanding of the stigma and its healing.

Education is a broad subject, so the researcher will focus more on the Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory of education to better assess its usefulness in promoting mental health awareness among men. The discipline of education in fostering mental health awareness can be overwhelming without knowing how to process new information about mental health into pre-existing categories or schemas you already know, helping you make sense of the latest information.

[1] Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,* 8.

The researcher believes that a lack of mental health awareness among men has negatively impacted their ability to express themselves authentically in worship, which can lead to feelings of isolation and prevent their spiritual growth. It is essential for men to understand how information about mental health is processed and to create an optimal learning environment. There is a significant gap that exists between men and women, where women traditionally outnumber men in attendance. The researcher believes that Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory can be helpful in men's mental health by helping them understand and manage their negative thoughts.

What exactly is Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory? According to A. AntonioGonzález-Prendes and Stella M.Resko, Cognitive Behavioral Learning is the approach that is rooted in the fundamental principle that an individual's cognitions play a significant and primary role in the development and maintenance of emotional and behavioral responses to life situations. In CBT models, cognitive processes, in the form of meanings, judgments, appraisals, and assumptions associated with specific life events, are the primary determinants of one's feelings and actions in response to life events and thus either facilitate or hinder the process of adaptation."[2]

Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory can be very helpful in helping men with their mental health issues especially in modifying negative thoughts and patterns. The best way to describe Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory according to the researcher is to think about a triangle where there are thoughts, feeling and behavior. So lets say that a person is rehearsing thoughts that he has diabetes, which brings on the feeling of feeling

[2] A. Antonio González-Prendes and Stella M.Resko, Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory, Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Theory, Practice, and Research, Sage Publication Inc, 2012, pg. 14-40. doi: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230597.n2.

crummy or depressed that they will never be able to do this, which leads to the behavior of eating chocolate cake. This process will repeat indefinitely. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy will choose where to intervene in this process of that triangle.

Our negative thoughts have a profound impact on our moods, so if we change the way we think, we can also change the way we feel. Cognitive Behavioral Theory will interrupt our negative thought patterns and replace them with less negative thoughts. You don't want to replace it with a thought that is not realistic, for it must be obtainable and believable. Cognitive Behavioral Theory or Therapy is after changing core beliefs because it is our core beliefs that drives how we feel, how with think and how we behave.

Understanding the impact of Cognitive Behavioral learning theory on the discipline of education is crucial for tracking this research and behavior. It is the researcher's goal to highlight the impact that Cognitive Behavioral Learning theory has on the discipline of education among adult males. As the researcher thinks about this project it reminds him of the Sankofa bird, an African symbol that means 'return and retrieve.' Using the disciplines and theory, my goal is to reclaim our need for awareness of mental health, no matter how difficult it may be, to move forward. We live in a time when we are prevented from returning to retrieving our past, fearing it may make others uncomfortable.

For example, the researcher wants to point out how Cognitive Behavioral learning theory impacts our social life. According to John Earnest Goldthorpe in, *An Introduction to Sociology*, defines sociology as "An organized endeavor to increase human self-

knowledge and self-understanding through the systematic study of our social life."[3] The goal is to help today's descendants of adult men to be fully aware of themselves with the understanding, considering not only today's social life but also through their ancestors' social life. The study of social life is a study of ourselves. We are a part of social life. In understanding ourselves, we gain insight into the lives of men, causing a reciprocal enlightenment between the two.

Given the broad scope of sociology, the focus will be primarily on the sociology of our neglect. Seth Abrutyn, in his article, describes the two types of sociological trauma: "collective trauma" and "cultural trauma."[4] Abrutyn defines collective trauma as the "destruction of infrastructure and the ensuing negative mental health outcomes" and "cultural trauma as the imposition of historical and ongoing attacks by a dominant group on the culture of a group of people sharing a collective identity."[5] Abrutyn sketches a theory of social trauma that aims to bring these two types and meanings together, highlighting their similarities and differences.

Cognitive Behavioral Learning Theory, when applied correctly, helps learners modify and identify negative thoughts related to mental health issues. Cognitive Behavioral learning theory will also help a person with PTSD process his or her traumatic experience. According to Nakao et al. (M, Shirotsuki, K, Sugaya, N). "The results of several randomized controlled trials indicated that CBT was effective for a variety of

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[3] John Earnest Goldthorpe, *An Introduction to Sociology* (Oxford, UK: Cambridge University, 1968), 3.

[4] Seth Abrutyn, "The Roots of Social Trauma," *Sage* 14 (2023): 66, https://doi.org/10.1177/21568693231213088.

[5] Abrutyn, "The Roots of Social Trauma," 66.

mental problems (e.g., anxiety disorder, attention deficit hypersensitivity disorder, bulimia nervosa, depression, hypochondriasis)."[6]

Cognitive Behavioral Theory also impacts the psychology that surrounds the inner experience and behavior of men. According to Wolff Werner, in *What is Psychology: A Basic Survey*, states, "Psychology deals with man's inner experiences and his behavior, with the interrelationship of both, with the organs influencing experience and behavior, and with the relationship of the experiencing and behaving individual to his environment."[7] Psychology depends significantly upon the point of view of the psychologist. There are different perspectives in psychology, beginning with simplification.

What is education? David Snedden's article "How to Define Education" shares that "Education is a spiritual revaluation of human life. Its task is to reorient the individual, enabling them to take a richer and more significant view of their experiences and place them above, rather than within, the system of their beliefs and ideas. If education is not liberalizing, it is not education."[8] In other words, education is a way of life. Education helps us evolve as individuals and understand our place in the world.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word cognitive means "connected to thinking or conscious mental processes."[9] Cognition and behavior are deeply

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[6] Nakao M, Shirotsuki K, Sugaya N, Cognitive-behavioral therapy for management of mental health and stress-related disorders: Recent advances in techniques and technologies, Biopsychosoc Med. 2021 Oct 3;15(1):16. doi: 10.1186/s13030-021-00219-w.

[7] Wolff Werner, *What is Psychology* (New York, NY: Grune and Stratton, 1947), 1.

[8] David Snedden, "How to Define Education City," *Sage* 28, no. 8 (1928): 1.

[9] "Cognitive," Cambridge Dictionary, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cognitive

interconnected, influencing how a person acts or reacts in their environment. It emphasizes that learning is influenced by how individuals process information (cognition) and how their behaviors are shaped by environmental factors and internal thoughts and feelings (behavior). Cognitive Behavior learning theory connection to education is its connection to its thoughts, feelings and behaviors which can influence the students' performance in the classroom.

Humanity viewed education from several worldviews, with all of them impacting the male in a negative role. It is my goal to show how men have been miseducated through a humanist, capitalistic, and Christian worldview. The impact educated the males to think of themselves as hopeless, helpless, and shameful if they ever admit or own any type of mental health issues. Education will be used to help the descendants of men recover from the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder of neglect. The adult male never received any mental help for many years. The help they received was primarily physical.

The project problem is focused on the healing of intergenerational neglect that men endured and has been passed down from one generation to another through their DNA. This neglect gets down through families that negatively impact subsequent generations. Parents with undiagnosed mental health issues or experiences of trauma may have trouble in providing sufficient care and support for their children, potentially leading to a cycle of neglect. Limited awareness about mental health can impact men in ways that may not realize.

It is possible to be down so long until one can start thinking that down is their permanent address. This is what socialization does: it causes people to begin believing what others say about them. One might ask how something that happened so long ago

still has a traumatizing effect today. Dr. Degruy stated, "The enslavement experience was one of continual violent attacks on body, mind, and spirit. Men, women, and children were traumatized throughout their lives, and the violent attacks during slavery persisted long after emancipation."[10] This is an example of how miseducation has impacted the slave to adapt their attitudes, passions, and behavior to just survive.

These adaptations led to generations of trauma that lasted to this very day. This trauma is displayed throughout the school system, the prison system, the political system, and the socioeconomic system. The negative impact of adaptation has led to some behaviors in the adult male community that work against how the community is perceived in comparison to the rest of the communities in the country. It is very traumatic for the male to be perceived as weak due to acknowledgement to his own mental health issues.

The adult male community has been traumatized historically from systemic neglect of our mental awareness that has impacted their lives. The community can begin its healing process through education. Education can promote healing by impowering the male to understand and manage his emotional health. Education can extend beyond the classroom setting by creating safe spaces for individual growth. Men can be educated in how to foster mental health awareness through taking control of their lives without being interrupted by social stigmas.

Cognitive behavioral learning theory can help men to understand how these social stigmas against them getting support for mental health problems developed and maintained. For example, with men who suffer in silence with depression carry around

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[10] Degruy*, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 7.

with them the stigma that "beliefs about depression are that people with this disease are needy, dependent on others, helpless, and unpredictable. Less commonly, people with depression can also be viewed as strange, lacking self-control, frightening, aggressive, and dangerous."[11]

To unlearn the stigmas that comes with mental health issue can be done through lectures and classes. According to Joseph Finklestein and Oleg Lapshin stated in their article "Reducing depression stigma using web-based programs" in the International Journal of Medical Informatics that "The general public and high school students can be educated to reduce psychiatric stigma with lectures and classes. A recent randomized controlled trial showed positive effect of web-based depression literacy intervention on stigmatizing attitudes to depression in individuals with elevated depression scores."[12]

In Christopher Lasch book called "The culture of narcissism" stated "To live for the moment is the prevailing passion to live for yourself, not for your predecessor or posterity. We are losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future. It is the wanning of the sense of historical time."[13] Lasch argues that history is important grand scheme of education. The way the educational system looks today is directly impacted by historical processes and events. Present day teachers have inherited all the debates,

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[11] Joseph Finkelstein, Oleg Lapshin, "Reducing depression stigma using a web-based program," *International Journal of Medical Informatics 76,* no. 10 (October 2007): 726. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijmedinf.2006.07.004

[12] Joseph Finkelstein, Oleg Lapshin, "Reducing depression stigma using a web-based program," International Journal of Medical Informatics 76, no. 10 (October 2007): 726. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijmedinf.2006.07.004

[13] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in a Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, NY: W.W Norton and Company, 1979), 5

controversies and reforms of past, and we will in turn will place our stamp by impacting what the schools of tomorrow would look like.

Cognitive Behavioral learning theory helps to connect historical continuity helping men to acknowledge that their current thoughts about mental health have been shaped by the past experiences and learning. The researcher can see the possibility for real change in men behavior towards mental health by acknowledging the stinking thinking of past stigmas concerning what it means to be a real man. The miseducation of the past has kept men chained to their past thoughts that was not true concerning mental health.

The adult male community has been plagued with a long history of miseducation of social and economic devastation. This devastation is just the side effect of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from dealing with life without any mental health support. You can also see this in the educational system of this country. We are losing our sense of history that allows us to learn from it. Education of our past is important to our present and our future. Learning from the past helps us to learn who we are and how we come to be. It supports the development of skills to prevent errors.

If there is a cry for healing in the adult male community from trauma, it is now. This cry has gone unheard because, for the most part, it is believed that this is just how this community is, and there is no helping themselves. However, there is help, not from food stamps, welfare, or food banks (though these are helpful). This community needs a real encounter with history. Education is important for individual and societal advancement. The researcher believes that education will foster mental health awareness to reduce social stigmas and seeking support.

The men in our community are still at war with themselves, and we are not yet free. For example according to Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson in *The Cool Pose* state that "Black males have the highest rates (except for native American men) of several important indicators of social stress in the United States."[14] Abraham Lincoln once said, "While there are whips and men to use them, there will be no peace…when men are brothers and men are free, the war will end."[15] Although Abraham Lincoln was speaking of the Civil War and not the African American community, it is still true concerning men in general.

Education is also important in Psychology for the purpose of understanding human behavior. According to Wolff Werner in *What is Psychology*? A basic survey states, "Psychology is the assembled verifiable facts of investigations from the psychological point of view."[16] What are the verifiable facts of investigations of the psychology of men and how that psychology affected today's adult males in the community?

Today, being an adult male has meant being psychologically castrated, rendering them impotent. They went on to say that this impotence left men powerless in the areas of exacerbating existing mental health issues, making them harder to treat, and increase the risk of developing chronic physical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. It is crucial to prioritize in educating men in mental health awareness. It is the researcher

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[14] Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *The Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 1992), 12.

[15] Majors and Billson, *The Cool Pose*, 12.

[16] Wolff Werner, *What is Psychology: Basic Survey* (New York, NY: Grune and Stratton, 1947), 61.

belief that the church must participate in educating men concerning mental health awareness from a Christian perspective.

Educationally, we need to learn our history and how it has contributed to the development of our mental health foundation if you trace it far enough. In the field of psychology, there has been a long-standing bias to look for the problem within the individual rather than outside the individual, such as in neighborhoods, institutions, and organizations. It is always easier to look outside ourselves than take an inside look. Looking inside requires honesty and integrity to face what we do not want to admit to ourselves. According to Dr. Henry Cloud, he states, "Who a person is will ultimately determine if their brains, talents and competencies, energy, efforts, deal-making abilities, and opportunities will succeed."[17] Looking outside of oneself has always been easier than looking inward because that is where all these attributes are determined for success.

The three pre-conditions of education are defined by Phillip Jackson in *What is Education?* "The first pre-condition is motion. This deals with how thought moves. Thought seldom stands still; it is constantly on the move, which is the natural inclination of thought to be in motion. The second pre-condition is grounding. Thought is useless if it is not grounded. Thoughts must land somewhere if education is to take place. For a teacher, grounding is crucial if the students are to follow their announcement of what the topic is to be. The teacher must ground the thoughts of each student with a resolute conviction or something they believe to be important. Lastly, there must be a rationale to

[17] Henry Cloud*, Why Integrity Matters* (New York, NY: Collins, 2006), 8.

"the grounding that the teacher is trying to present. The thoughts must be in line with some known facts."[18]

It is not enough to have a thought that moves if it is not grounded in some well-known facts. Jackson continues to point out that part of being human is having common sense to help us rationalize our thoughts. The problem is when we rely too heavily on common sense to ground our thoughts. The problem with relying too heavily on common sense is that it can become overly reliant on what is readily seen and heard. This is where education plays an important role when common sense fails us.

You cannot trust common sense all the time because common sense relies on the senses, and the senses cannot always be trusted. The senses can have you feeling up one day and down the next. But what do you do when education is miseducation, and common sense is true after all? According to Carter G. Woodson in *The Miseducation of the Negro* states concerning the relationship between the slave and the slave master, "When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his proper place and stay in it."[19]

For example, even if it is four hundred years of staying in it. Woodson goes on to say, "The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race

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[18] Phillip Jackson, *What is Education* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 32-34.

[19] Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Washington, DC: Oshun Publishing, 1933), 2.

does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race."[20] The poison of the miseducation of the educated men is not designed only to disable that man, but rather to help poison other men making their miseducation a part of their curriculum.

This is why I chose this discipline to help the men in our communities, even if the culture does not recognize a need for healing. The objective is to not only to bring healing to the adult male community but also to America. It is said that the hardest person to wake up from sleep is the one who is pretending to be asleep. It is the researchers hope that the hand of education will wake up the men in our communities to the need of mental health support.

When a community invests in its own education, it will have a positive impact not only on the community's economy but also on its social and psychological well-being. According to Dr. Nimisha K. Patal article Importance of yoga & meditation in education stating, "The modern education system emphasizes on science and technology in which the material progress is being achieved, but the inculcation of ethical, moral and spiritual values and promotion of healthy lifestyle are totally neglected."[21] The adult male community has been subjected to miseducation through the conditioning to continue to ignore their mental health issues.

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[20] Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, 69.

[21] Nimisha K, Patal, "Importance of Yoga and Meditation in Education," *International Journal of Research in all Subjects in Multi Languages* 7, no. 1 (January 2019): 72. https://www.raijmr.com/ijrsml/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/IJRSML_2019_vol07_issue_1_Eng_18.pdf.

Evans, Tsao, Sternlieb, and Zeltzer's article describes "the spiritual benefits of Yoga, including compassionate understanding, acceptance, and mindful awareness."[22] They add that while they refer to these as spiritual benefits, these concepts may be quite secular and share many similarities with mainstream psychological thinking.[23] The writer found it beneficial for his nightmares to do yoga just before daily afternoon naps and prior studying.

According to Beverly Martin, Blake Peck, and Daniel Terry in their article "Yoga in Schools that contributes to a positive classroom atmosphere for young children and educators: A PRISMA scoping review stating "A growing interest in the developmental consequences of extracurricular and after-school programs for children has seen the inclusion of yoga programs, with positive effects on student psychosocial outcomes such as self-regulation capitalizing on a child's propensity to be active."[24] Schools are important context for fostering social and emotional learning through yoga programs.

The researcher has always assumed that yoga was a useless exercise; in fact, The researcher did not see it as an exercise at all. It was not considered exercise if you were not sweating or breathing hard. Despite the researcher's personal views, Iyengar pointed out that yoga has long been viewed as a long-term promotion of both physical and mental

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[22] S. Evans, J.C.I Tsao, B. Sternlieb, and L.K. Zeltzer, "Using the Biopsychosocial Model to Understand the Health Benefits of Yoga," *Journals of Complementary and Integrative Medicine* 15 (2009): 1-22.

[23] Evans, Tsao, Sternlieb, and Zeltzer, "Using the Biopsychosocial Model to Understand the Health Benefits of Yoga," 1-22.

[24] Beverly Martin, Blake Peck, Daniel Terry, "Yoga in Schools that contributes to a positive classroom atmosphere for young children and educators: A PRISMA scoping review," Frontiers, March 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1352780.

health.[25] Iyengar also states that "The term Yoga comes from the Sanskrit root yuj. It refers to the union of the self with a higher power, universal consciousness, or God."[26] This is appealing because God was the most important part of all my exercises.

According to Barnes, Powell-Griner, Mcfann, and Nahin, in the *Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use Among Adults* states that "Yoga today is among the top ten most widely practiced forms of complementary health care in the United States with over 15 million adults having practiced yoga in 2008."[27] It is still yet growing, Yoga studios are being started all over the country today. Yoga can help a person to learn about their personality, and how to handle themselves in all life situations.

Yoga can assist Cognitive Behavioral Therapy by addressing the physiological aspects of these conditions, while Cognitive Behavioral Therapy focuses on the cognitive aspects, leading to a more holistic approach to treatment. Yoga helps the body that is going through stress that negatively impacts the body. According to Manjit K Khalsa, Julie M Greiner-Ferris, Stefan G Hofmann, and Sat Bir S Khalsa in their article Yoga-enhanced Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for anxiety management: A pilot study in the Clinical Psychology Psychotherapy journal stated that "Y-CBT may reduce depression and anxiety in a clinic population where clients suffer from multiple diagnoses including generalized anxiety disorder."[28]

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[25] B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1979), 12.

[26] Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 18.

[27] P. M. Barnes, E. Powell-Griner, K. Mcfann, and R. L. Nahin, "Advance Data," *Complementary and Alternative Medicine use Among Adults* (2002): 1-19.

[28] Manjit K. Khalsa, Julie M. Greiner-Ferris, Stefan G. Hofmann, Sat Bir S. Khalsa, "Yoga-Enhanced Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Y-CBT) for Anxiety Management: A Pilot Study," Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy 32, no.4 (July/Aug 2015): 364, https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.1902.

There are some trends in education that the researcher wants to discuss such as the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education. Artificial intelligence has already begun to transform other industries, and education is no exception. The impact of Artificial Intelligence shows a lot of potential for example, According to Alexandara Harry in her article "The Role AI in Education," stated that "AI can analyze students' past performance to identify areas of difficulty and provide targeted support in those areas. AI can also adapt to the student's learning pace, slowing down, or speeding up instruction as necessary. Furthermore, AI can provide customize feedback on students' progress and offer suggestions for improvement leading to a more individualized and effective learning experience."[29]

Cognitive Behavioral Theory and AI have transformed the educational system and the mental health treatments provided patients suffering with generalized depression. AI chatbots now integrate Cognitive Behavioral Therapy by helping individuals identify and adjust cognitive distortions, fostering healthier thinking and coping skills. It has been shown that AI enhances Cognitive Behavioral Therapy by helping students to be more engaged and accessible by using game designs.

According to Maryam Farzan, Hamid Ebrahimi, Maryam Pourali, and Fatemeh Sabeti in their article Artificial Intelligence-Powered Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Chatbots, a Systematic Review in the Iranian Journal of Psychiatry stating that "AI-powered CBT chatbots offer a unique opportunity to make mental health interventions more inclusive and efficient. These chatbots can interactively engage the users in a

[29] Alexandara Harry, "The Role AI in Education*," Injuruty: Interdisciplinary Journal and Humanity* 2, no. 3 (March 2023): 261. https://radensa.ru/wpcontent/uploads/2024/05/Role_of_AI_in_Education.pdf

dialogue while being guided through CBT techniques such as cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, and mindfulness practices."[30]

Artificial Intelligence has the potential of transforming the education system due to chatbots (like ChatGPT) having improved so much that it can literally provide personalized tutoring with 24/7 support. Artificial Intelligence has already begun transforming classrooms k-12 offering personalized learning. Though Artificial Intelligence is an exciting trend in education, it has caused a large range of reactions in the education community from banning to enthusiastic embrace.

Another trend in the education community is Neuroeducation or educational neuroscience. According to Michael S.C Thomas, Daniel Ansari, and Victoria C.P Knowland in their article "Annual Research Review: Educational neuroscience: progress and prospects" defines Neuroeducation as "Educational neuroscience is an interdisciplinary research field that seeks to translate research findings on neural mechanisms of learning to educational practice and policy and to understand the effects of education on the brain."[31]

It focuses on how the brain learns, remembers and process information. According to Thomas, Ansari, Knowland in their article Annual Research Review: Educational neuroscience: progress and prospects stated that "The growth of the field has led to the establishment of new societies and groups: the International Mind, Brain and

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[30] Maryam Farzan, Hamid Ebrahimi, Maryam Pourali, and Fatemeh Sabeti, "Artificial Intelligence-Powered Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Chatbots, a Systematic Review," *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry* 20, no. 1, (January 2025): 102, doi: 10.18502/ijps.v20i1.17395.

[31] Michael Thomas, Daniel Ansari Victoria Knowland, "Annual Research Review: Educational Neuroscience: Progress and Prospects," *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 60, no. 4 (April 2019): :477, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12973.

Education Society (IMBES; www.imbes.org) was founded in 2004; in 2009, the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI) founded a Special Interest Group called 'Neuroscience and Education' which has been holding biannual meetings since 2010."[32]

There has been much debate about Educational Neuroscience about the validity of bringing knowledge from neuroscientific research to bear on educational problems. Nevertheless, this discipline is being explored across the globe. Some of the challenges of Neuroeducation is that it is very difficult to know the complexity of brain functions, ethical considerations and the need for rigorous research to validate its findings. The complexity of translating brain research into practical teaching strategies it's the most difficult to overcome.

According to Thomas, Ansari, and Knowland in their article Annual Research Review: Educational neuroscience: progress and prospects, stating "Tt is worth pointing out why the goal of the field is a very challenging one. First, the way the brain learns is complex. Second, learning is only one part of education. Third, society's goals for education are not necessarily clear. And fourth, even for psychology, successful translation from science to educational practice has proved difficult."[33]

Another trend is microlearning. Microlearning is an educational approach that delivers in short, focus burst. Microlearning has become a trending pedagogy. According

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[32] Michael Thomas, Daniel Ansari Victoria Knowland, "Annual Research Review: Educational Neuroscience: Progress and Prospects," *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 60, no. 4 (April 2019):477. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12973.

[33] Michael Thomas, Daniel Ansari Victoria Knowland, "Annual Research Review: Educational Neuroscience: Progress and Prospects," *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 60, no. 4 (April 2019):477. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12973.

to Janani Thillainadesan, David G. Le Couteur, Inam Haq, and Tim J Wilkinson in their article stated that “The concept of learning in small steps is not new to educators. Breaking content into smaller focused tasks is an established instructional design strategy to manage cognitive load.” This approach aids students by simplifying and limiting the information provided.

Microlearning offers advantages by delivering content in small, easily digestible modules. It is also cost effective than traditional training sessions, requiring very little resources. Examples of microlearning include flashcards, interactive quizzes, short video tutorials, and mobile apps. We can learn so much from microlearning for its flexible and engaging approach to education. Bite size learning helps the student to retain information and prevent cognitive overload.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Fostering mental health awareness among men at the Northern Hill United Methodist church has been a long time coming. Addressing men's mental health has, for the most part, been an unspoken issue due to cultural stigmas and men's resistance to being vulnerable enough to reach out to ask for help. Men often need God's love to heal traumas they hesitate to surrender, fearing emotional pain. Though churches today are beginning to see the need to address the mental health awareness crisis, there are still too many who have not caught up with that need.

Set before us as the body of Christ, this is an excellent opportunity to bring healing to the men in our congregations and communities. Northern Hill United Methodist Church has been serving the community for fifty years. They have been faithful in feeding the poor through their community food bank. They have also been a great support to widows and widowers, helping them through the grieving process to the other side of their pain. They also have a prison ministry and so much more, but through my observation, there has been a lack of addressing the neglect of mental health among men in the congregation.

Though the church has addressed loving God with their bodies and souls, not so much with their minds. Through observation, I do not believe this neglect stems from a

lack of care; instead, it results from the cultural stigmas they face. I also observed that this was a church of love; it causes their love to be blind to others' trauma, even when we love them. The men of Northern Hill United Methodist Church are truly loved, but I am not sure whether that love challenges them to know that it is okay to be vulnerable and that the church is a safe space to express their pain.

It is ironic that the church, being a place of love, is not always a safe space for people to be vulnerable. Everything begins with love if we adequately address the mental health crisis. The crisis among men is not going to go away, and neither will it be healed by implementing a specific medical procedure. It is essential to understand that the mental health crisis among men must be approached from a holistic point of view. Love must be launched from a holistic perspective, infused into mind, body, and soul.

The project implemented focused on how love can be a source of healing for the massive trauma men carry by fostering self-love and encouraging vulnerability and courage. Matthew 22:37 says, “Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.’” One way we can bring healing to men’s mental health is by first loving God and accepting that God wants to heal us, wherever we are hurt. We must be willing to express to God all our struggles, for this is an expression of letting God love us by being vulnerable to him.

The project that I will be presenting will focus on the neglect of mental health crises among men, but also on how men can overcome a crisis and manage it daily. Men need to realize that God does not love them because they are lovable, but rather, He makes the object of his love lovable. We are all damaged in one way or another, and,

with men being notorious for not facing what has damaged them, let God's love be the healing balm for our minds, bodies, and souls.

While the mission of the church is to be an expression of God's love to broken people, we must face the challenges that prevent us from being attentive and intentional to their needs. Men generally battle with all kinds of emotional pain, such as depression, shame, and anxiety. John 10:10 tells us that "the devil comes to kill, steal, and destroy," and this is what emotional pain does: it kills our sense of dignity, steals our sense of joy, and destroys our sense of self-worth. Fostering mental health awareness among men is crucial for the well-being of our society.

With the successful implementation of this project, we can look forward to a future where our adult men are not just aware of their mental health but also a significant asset to the church and society, bringing hope and optimism, and inspiring others to face the challenges of their mental health crisis. This is the future I envision and strive to achieve with the implementation of this project: a future where our adult men are empowered to face their mental health challenges.

Exploring the essence of this project provided the ideal concept for a qualitative research study with some quantitative elements. This research provided an opportunity to inform participants and foster meaningful discussions. The urgency of this project cannot be overstated; it is our best opportunity to equip our young men with the mental health awareness skills they need. With successful implementation, we can look forward to a future where our adult men have access to effective mental health care.

Variation Module

The variation module breaks this project into smaller, manageable pieces. This project will provide a range of display tools to address mental health awareness issues. Examples of tools used in this project include information posters, videos of interviews with admired men, mental health clubs, mental health applications, and peer support groups. Several questions were asked in each session, opening many doors to topics to address within this context.

The project helped participants have intimate conversations about specific issues they were struggling with. These conversations led others to participate and to foster future dialogue. These conversations also led to some complex wounds, which were addressed by a licensed counselor (Donna Medina) who was present at the meeting.

Construction Module

Northern Hill United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas, supports my role as facilitator for a six-week project on men's mental health awareness, focused on intergenerational neglect. This project implements a mental health awareness program with interconnected components applicable to a range of mental health issues. The components include applying biblical principles, increasing mental health literacy, promoting the integration of education and mental health, and creating safe spaces for men to be vulnerable. There are also foundational topics that will be used to promote mental health awareness.

The first foundational topic is the biblical foundation, showing the connection between the need for physical healing and mental health healing. The foundational

scripture is John 5:1-11, which tells the story of the paralytic man at the pool of Bethesda. The second foundation is historical, drawing on three events to illustrate the devastation caused by the neglect of mental health. The three illustrations used for this project were: the Freedman's Bureau, the Great Depression, and the Vietnam War.

Thirdly, the theological foundation highlights the importance of the healing (Soteriology) of our mental health. It also shows how the Holy Spirit is needed to guide and nurture our mental health, giving us hope and confidence. Lastly, the interdisciplinary foundation provides a practical strategy through education by supporting one's mental health awareness.

Methodology

I was also concerned with the racial makeup of the church. Northern Hill United Methodist Church is 95% Caucasian. Given that there is only one African American family in the church of almost 2,000 people in Texas, it was unclear if this would play a role in their decision to participate in the project. My interaction with some of the White males in the church has led me to believe that there is some covert racism and sometimes a little more obvious racism taking place within the congregation.

Mission Stratagem

All participants volunteered to improve their mental health awareness through this project. The church's pastor escorted four White male retired pastors to participate in the project. Each former pastor admitted that they participated in the project as a favor to the pastor and would not have done so without her encouragement. The pastor admitted that

she did not think anyone would show up, but that she really believed in my project and wanted to support it.

There were also three black participants, all my personal guests whom I brought from the community. I also was anticipating that no one would show up for the project for various reasons. I reminded the pastor's guest that participation was voluntary and not required. The pastor and I were concerned about three main issues. First, my original projects, which were more about fostering healing within the African American community from intergenerational trauma passed down from slavery, were not very well received by the church board. The church outright rejected this project due to the subject of African slave trauma. They were concerned that the subject did not benefit the entire congregation. The church board felt the subject was not in line with the congregation's concerns, which told me a lot about the church board and their perception of the congregation.

For this reason, I had to change the project's topic to one better suited to my context. I was able to change the subject to its current topic: “Fostering Mental Health Awareness Among Adult Men by Addressing Intergenerational Neglect in Men in Northern Hill United Methodist Church.” The church board accepted the new topic and approved it as my project to teach for six weeks in one of the church's classrooms. My last concern was that men are generally notoriously known for neglecting their mental health, and for that reason, I did not think that I would get enough participants for the project to be conducted.

To protect the privacy of our participants, no names were used. Instead, they were assigned a number in their journals, pre-survey and post-survey questions, and interview questions. This information was intended solely for facilitator use. After each study, participants could speak privately or publicly with the instructor to clarify and deepen their understanding. The facilitator of this project taught participants in all six weeks of this course. The project consisted of two interviews, weekly journaling, a pre- and post-questionnaire, and group discussions.

Despite all my concerns, I saw each week a growing number of participants from seven to twelve. In fact, two of the retired pastors told me they had no intention of returning to the project after their first day, but they found it interesting and extremely needful within the church and the community. They also stated they wish this were a presentation when they were pastoring their congregations. The overarching goal of this project was to foster mental health awareness and cultivate a daily self-care plan for men within the church.

Data was collected after each session and provided to the participants weekly to answer additional questions and continue journaling for the project. Some participants felt very uncomfortable writing and expressed themselves privately to the instructor to report. The difficulties expressed by three participants were directly related to the sensitivity of the questions. One participant preferred to do his journaling in class rather than alone at home.

Project Formation and Inquiry

The project began ten minutes late, with people gradually arriving. The project's initial three weeks took place in trailer 103 on the church campus. The project location was the first complaint because many people did not know where trailer 103 was located, and many of the men ended up in a different men's class. Everyone was eager to learn about the various topics of mental health, especially when it came to men. The extensive PowerPoint presentations provided accurate information, and everyone really appreciated the powerful videos of male testimonies of famous men in various fields, such as sports, politics, and the pastorate.

The project's goal was to help each participant achieve more than they expected from the class. Although the project focused on mental health awareness, the purpose was to inspire men to make a personal commitment to a daily self-help routine. The project's pre- and post-questionnaires measure changes in understanding across three areas. First, their understanding of what mental health awareness is. They know where to get mental health support when needed. And finally, their knowledge of the importance of being vulnerable about their mental health.

Our project methodology began with a clear definition of mental health awareness. I aimed to keep participants engaged in their personal mental health awareness for six weeks, using a familiar format to ensure comfort and active involvement. If men are to survive, they must realize that you can't fix what you won't face. The facilitator allowed himself to be transparent to instill in the participants the belief that we can discover God's strength in our weakness.

Implementation

Synopsis of Participants

The project had twelve participants: seven African Americans, one Mexican, and four Caucasians. One hundred percent of the men expressed having a traumatic experience in their lives. Ninety percent of the men admitted that they have never seen a therapist in their lives. Before attending the project, 100% of the men did not believe that they had any mental health issues. Lastly, 100% of the men were raised to believe that men do not cry or complain.

We briefly discussed how being raised to believe that men don't cry or complain has either hindered or helped them cope with their mental health. Participant Four mentioned that his wife told him he has difficulty showing emotion. Participants Nine and Eleven agreed that this issue exists. Most of the men thought that complaining was the same as nagging (considered a woman's thing). Participant Eight explained that not showing emotion is an unspoken male code understood among men.

The ages ranged from thirty to sixty-five, and four out of the twelve participants had a Doctor in Ministry. The rest of the group had either a bachelor's or a master's degree. Rumination led me to think about how to deliver this project effectively and clearly. I led each of the six sessions. The number of participants each week varied but never fell below nine.

My professional and peer colleagues played a crucial role in offering suggestions and helping me prepare for this project. Their insights and expertise proved invaluable. Additionally, Dr. Antonio Neely agreed to assist me with this initiative. Their significant

contributions, especially to mental health awareness and counseling, greatly improved the project. I truly appreciated their open conversations, efforts to reduce stigma, and the inspiration they provided for help-seeking behaviors.

Each participant was given a number to identify them. The following are the participants, their identifiable numbers, and education levels.

Participant One is a high school graduate with some college and works as a land surveyor.

Participant Two is a college graduate with a master's degree and a retired pastor.

Participant Three is a college graduate with a bachelor's degree. This participant is a groundskeeper supervisor at the University of Texas and is a part of Divine Nine.

Participant Four is a college graduate with a Doctor of Ministry and a retired pastor.

Participant Five is a college graduate with a master's degree and supervisor.

Participant Six is a college graduate, has a bachelor's degree, and is a human resource manager.

Participant Seven is a high school graduate and a waiter at a restaurant.

Participant Eight is a college graduate with a Doctor of Ministry and is a retired pastor.

Participant Nine is a high school graduate, associate advisor at food pantry, and part of Divine Nine.

Participant Ten is a high school graduate with some college and is in between jobs.

Participant Eleven is a college graduate with a master's degree and a retired pastor.

Participant Twelve is a high school graduate with total disability.

Participant Thirteen is a college graduate, a church leader, and part of Divine Nine.

Participant Fourteen is a college graduate and works at the registration office at the University of Texas.

Week One - (September 10, 2025) Introduction

Our first session began with me as the facilitator welcoming the participants and thanking them for their willingness to volunteer for the project. The project participants on the first day included twelve people. We opened with a prayer and a scripture reading. I explained to the participants that there will be a mental health awareness scripture for each week for them to write about in their journals. This week's scripture was 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Journal books, pre- and post-surveys, and informed consent forms were already on the table waiting for participants to fill out.

I explained in detail what the informed consent form covered and asked if they agreed to sign it. I also introduced the licensed counselor and the role they will play if anyone needs to discuss triggers they might be experiencing. This process took about thirty minutes, and the entire procedure was outlined so each person could easily follow along in the study.

I began the session by introducing the six-week course titled “Fostering Mental Health Awareness Among Men.” The men had a few questions concerning how much they had to share about their personal trauma. I assured the participants that they did not have to share any of their personal trauma; in fact, the sole purpose of the project was to get men to play an intentional role in addressing their mental health, not discuss their personal trauma. I took the time to share my own personal journey with mental health and how it has tremendously helped me not to let my past sabotage my future.

There was also a lecture titled “The Family Circle that Must be Broken,” with PowerPoint support. It is a lecture about how men face societal pressure to be strong, assertive, and not show vulnerability or pain. The lecture also focused on how the environments you grow up in and the experiences you have as a child can affect your mental and physical health throughout your life. In a group discussion, we reviewed how neglecting one’s mental health can be an intergenerational trauma that gets passed down from one generation to the next through the family. The participants express their surprise at discovering how they dealt with trauma that was subliminally passed to them from their parents.

The class concluded with an assignment for their journaling. Each participant was asked to write about their first coping mechanism that came to mind and then asked, Do you think it is helpful or harmful, and why? Each participant expressed their enjoyment of the course and excitement in participating in the project. Two of the participants said they came only as a favor to the pastor and had no plan to return, but the project had inspired them to finish.

Week Two - (September 17, 2025) Biblical Foundations

For the second session, there were nine participants for the project. I received phone calls from two of the students, notifying me in advance that they would be unable to attend the class. One had a last-minute family emergency, and the other had a work-related conflict. There was one new participant who was not in the class the previous week. Some relatives encouraged the participant to take the course, thinking it would benefit him.

The chosen text for the Biblical Foundations during this PowerPoint presentation was St. John 5:1-11: the healing after the healing, which states:

> Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

During this session, participants received background on the text and the hermeneutical approach. I recounted the story of the man at the pool of Bethesda, highlighting how we often overlook his thirty-eight-year struggle with being crippled, which can affect his mental well-being. This prompted some participants to share other scriptures that reflect how we tend to focus on physical ailments while neglecting mental health. One participant mentioned his father, a Vietnam veteran, who did not receive mental health support after losing his leg.

He also went on to talk about seeing his father's hand as a traumatic experience for him to witness as a child. Others discussed similar issues in how our physical ailments trump our mental ailments. In this text, we looked at this man's journey of faith and transformation in his mental health. We explore how faith provides a "compass" to navigate challenges, fostering resilience and a sense of belonging to combat isolation.

We discussed the need for personal desire and action to receive healing. Jesus' question, "Do you want to be made whole?" was not for information but to probe the man's readiness for transformation. This highlights that true transformation begins with a personal desire for change, moving beyond just wanting a miracle. This was the question posed during our group discussion. We discussed that we may have become so familiar with our hopelessness that we may have become dependent on unhealthy coping skills.

We discussed what it means to soak in the Word of God to support our mental health. We talked about how we can use scripture to pray, meditate, and capture negative thoughts that are not conducive to our mental health. We discussed in detail what I call the "soak, sow, and flow process." We soak our minds in the truths of scripture, which allows us to sow them into our circumstances, and have the Holy Spirit flow through them.

We concluded tonight's class by practicing this process with this week's scripture focus, Jeremiah 29:11: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" This is the instruction for this method: To practice the "Soak, Sow, and Flow" method, first Soak by immersing yourself in God's Word and a peaceful environment to absorb it. Then, Sow by praying what you learned back to God, confessing sin, and asking for help to apply it.

And finally, Flow by allowing God's power and guidance to work through you in your daily life. We concluded class with a prayer.

Week 3- (September 24, 2025) Historical Foundations

The third class had nine participants. Three participants traveled together; however, the designated driver was unable to participate due to prior church commitments. Popeye's chicken dinners were provided to the participants as a gesture of feeding them since class was taking place during their dinner time. The class began with a reading from Jeremiah 17:7-8, which discusses trust and confidence, using the metaphor of a tree planted by water whose roots reach toward a stream: "It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Week Three's class focused on three historical events that highlight the negative impact that these events had on men's mental health. The first historical event is the Freedman's Bureau, which was a temporary agency established in 1865 to assist newly freed slaves and poor southern whites in the aftermath of the Civil War. I wanted to show the consequences of neglecting mental health, especially among newly freed slaves. We had a very productive discussion concerning the psychological and emotional injuries inflicted by slavery. It was astounding to see how shocked they were by their understanding of slavery had been watered down, especially among the Caucasian participants.

I also included two other events—the Great Depression and COVID-19— to help the other participants who were not African Americans identify more directly. We

discussed the Great Depression, the most severe economic downturn in history, which occurred between 1929 and 1941. Three of the men immediately identified with this period because their grandparents grew up during it, and they have heard a lot of discussion about it from them. One participant expressed the belief that his concern about money and the importance of tracking finances may have originated from those conversations.

We discussed at great length the impact that the Great Depression had on men. We talked about their humiliation and shame of not being able to provide for their families. We talked about how men see themselves as providers and protectors. The Great Depression caused an identity crisis for men, leading them to feel like failures and experience hopelessness. All of this led to an increase in domestic violence, suicide, family abandonment, and alcoholism. Two of the men express their pain at feeling hopeless for the same reason. After class, I encouraged them to talk with the licensed counselor, but they both insisted they would not.

As a side note, the men probably would have talked to the counselor if she had not been a woman. I could not locate a male counselor, but I thought it would have been better received if it had been a male counselor. This is one improvement I could make for future opportunities in my project. This is not to say that men are better at it, but rather that men are more likely to open up to another man than a woman.

Lastly, there is COVID-19. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a type of coronavirus. Since I was in a coma from COVID-19 for almost seven months, I took the time to be transparent about the impact of that ordeal on my mental health. Everyone in the class immediately identified with this event, and almost

all of them said they knew someone who had passed away from it. Other than me, five out of nine reported catching COVID, but not as severe as mine.

In our closing, we practiced soaking in the Word by utilizing Jeremiah 17:7-8. The participants unanimously agreed that this practice helped support their mental health. They also found other uses for it, such as memorizing scripture, and one said it was used in their yoga class. We ended class with a prayer. Many remained to discuss the Freedmen's Bureau further. To my surprise, none of the participants had ever heard of the Freedmen's Bureau and wanted more information on it.

Week Four - (October 1, 2025) Theological Foundation

The fourth class had fourteen participants, including two new participants. One of the doctoral participants volunteered to bring an assortment of tacos and soda to share. I was not sure if this accounted for all the participants showing up with the two extras; nevertheless, I was glad to see them. We opened with prayer and the reading of our new mental health scripture, Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Going into tonight's topic of Theological Foundations, I, as the facilitator, was concerned that this class might be less entertaining, so I spent extra time thinking about how I would present it. I opened by asking whether anyone in the class had been saved. Everyone in the group raised their hands. We began a brief discussion, with heavy participation, about what it means to be saved. After everyone shared what salvation in

Jesus Christ meant to them, one of the doctoral participants pointed out that we had all, without realizing it, referred to salvation only in terms of our spirits.

I introduced the doctrine of Soteriology to the group. Only five out of fourteen had heard of it. Essentially, Soteriology is the study of salvation. I also connected salvation to healing to clarify that Soteriology focuses on being saved, not merely healed. We discussed key aspects like justification, sanctification, faith, repentance, grace, and Christ's atonement. I provided brief definitions of each so they could build a foundational understanding.

My next question to the group was, "What does salvation have to do with mental health?" After the question lingered in the room for a while, a few participants seemed to agree on one thing: that salvation brings us peace. With that answer, I read to them Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God."

I also pointed out other ways in which salvation impacts our mental health, such as providing a secure sense of identity and worth in God's unconditional love. One of the participants shared with the group that he suffered from low self-esteem, and he testified that the more he understood who God was, the more he understood his own worth. He said he spent years debating with God about his identity, but eventually learned to accept and love himself, knowing he is loved and accepted.

I examined the Ransom Theory in Soteriology. The base scripture for the ransom theory is 1 Timothy 2:6: "who gave himself as a ransom for all." In other words, the Ransom Theory is the belief that Adam and Eve sold humankind out to the devil through

their disobedience, and Jesus had to repurchase us through His own blood through His obedience to God. This raised many theological questions among the group, such as who Jesus paid the ransom to and why?

These questions were raised mainly by the doctoral participants, and it almost developed into a debate, but I was able to ring the topic in to focus on mental health. We also had a brief discussion about the wrath of God. We were able to define the wrath of God as not an uncontrolled anger but rather a holy and righteous response to sin. We concluded that the wrath of God is an expression of God's unconditional love for us. God loves us too much to idly sit by and watch us live in rebellion against him. We discussed how Jesus was not only concerned with our souls, but also our mental health, and He paid for it with His own blood.

As we conclude tonight's class, we soaked in the Word of Matthew 11:28-30 as practiced in our other courses. We closed with prayer, and afterward we lingered to discuss the Ransom Theory further. Though there was some disagreement on the subject, we all agreed that salvation is good for mental health.

Week Five - (October 8, 2025) Interdisciplinary Foundations

The fifth class consisted of fourteen participants. Pizza was served tonight, and more men arrived before class started. By the time class started, we had three more men in our class. Through my observation, I noticed that as the men were adding up, they continued to return the following weeks for class and expressed that the food did inspire them to come, but it was the class that kept them coming back. Two of the men had been coming back, wishing they had been a part of the class from the beginning. One

mentioned that the class was relevant to his mental health situation and that it helped him recognize he was experiencing a crisis. I shared with him that we did have a licensed counselor on standby, and that tonight's class will be focusing on how to get mental health support.

We opened our class with a prayer by one of the class participants, and a scripture reading, which was Psalm 34:17-18: “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” After reading the scripture, we heard a testimony from one of the participants that this project was a pleasant surprise for him, because he only came to the class as a favor to the pastor, not knowing it would be this impactful.

This session, our class focused on the discipline of education, which we defined as the lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and understanding through teaching, training, and personal experiences, aiming to foster personal growth, critical thinking, and societal contribution. For our group discussion, we discussed how our lack of knowledge of our mental health has impacted our day-to-day living. The gentleman who told me in private how he discovered, since being in this, how he may be in the middle of a mental health crisis, publicly shared it with the group.

When he started sharing some red flags indicating he was experiencing a mental health crisis, it encouraged others to support and pray for him. We are currently in an era where mental health literacy is lacking, particularly among men. Mental health literacy is understood as the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to sustain good mental health and identify mental health crises. This aligns with our class discussion on

education about personal mental health discoveries and how targeted mental health interventions can benefit men.

We discussed how normalizing help-seeking can help men because we all tend to ignore our mental health until it is too late. I reiterated how important it is for men to normalize seeking help in a crisis. I gave the men six things that are ok: 1) It is ok to let others help, 2) It is ok to start over, 3) It is ok to take a break, 4) It is ok to admit that you are not ok, 5) It is ok to make healing a priority, and 6) It is ok to seek Jesus and therapy. I also gave the men a chart to follow called the Wellness Wheel.

I encouraged each man to regularly review this chart and act on it daily. We divided into groups of three to spend fifteen minutes discussing how to transform these eight dimensions into habits and make beneficial choices. Afterward, we reconvened to share our insights. We engaged in a thorough discussion on each dimension to support men in taking care of themselves. One participant even found a larger poster of the eight dimensions on Amazon to hang in his room and follow daily. The other men noted the poster and expressed their intention to do the same.

Then men also saw another item on their own that would be useful after the class was over, in a book called “The Eight Dimensions of Wellness: Goal-Planning Wellness Journal” and “Wellness Eight: The Eight Dimensions to Achieving Incredible Health, Increased Happiness and Continual Well-being.” I told the class that I had heard of these books, but I had not read them. I asked them for a few weeks and would let them know by email whether these books are conducive to our mental health.

As we concluded that evening's class, we soaked in the Word using the mental health scripture Psalm 34:17-18. After the closing prayer, I checked on the participant

who reported a mental health crisis to ensure safety. I wanted to check to see if there was any immediate emergency by checking if he felt suicidal or wanted to bring harm to others, but he stated he did not. I also suggested that he talk with the licensed counselor/grief counselor just to be sure, which he did, and was cleared.

Week Six - (October 15, 2025) Summary and Inquiry

Week Six was our last night together, and we opened with prayer and a scripture reading of Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Since this was our last night, I took the time to thank the men for their generosity of time and energy for this project. I gave a brief, comprehensive recap of the project. Afterward, I handed out the project post-survey for them to complete before leaving.

The project's final week concluded with the group gathering to watch a video by Dr. Brené Brown titled "The Power of Vulnerability."[1] The purpose of this video was to inspire men to be vulnerable about their mental health. Due to the stigmas associated with mental health and mental illness, men tend to shut down, never addressing what they have been carrying for so long. For our group discussion, I asked the group what comes to mind when they hear someone being vulnerable.

While everyone understood what vulnerability means academically, none of them wanted to practice it. We explored why vulnerability invokes so much fear. One participant's comment stood out: "I am afraid that I might not be accepted if people knew

[1] Brown, Brene. "The Power of Vulnerability." YouTube, 2011. 20:49. https://youtu.be/iCvmsMzlF7o?si=RMmBKD5KTNNgB_BM.

what I'm wrestling with." All agreed that their main fear is the possibility of not being worthy of connection. Vulnerability involves exposing oneself, something many men find difficult to do.

Summary of Learnings

The foundation of this project is my personal journey and pathway to healing for my mental health. For most of my life, I have always suffered with shame, guilt, and loneliness. I would carry all three conditions throughout my life and ministry without realizing it until recently. It took a seven-month coma from COVID-19 to bring all the specific roots of my shame, guilt, and loneliness to the surface from my childhood and teenage years.

The project lasted six weeks and was facilitated to achieve a specific outcome, inspiring change in men's attitudes towards mental health awareness. Pre-survey questions were distributed to gauge participants' perceptions of mental health before the start of the project. These questions were designed to identify the stumbling blocks and fill in the gaps in the obstacles that can hinder men from addressing their mental health.

Question One: Do you know what mental health awareness is? If so, define it.

Participant One answered no but felt that people with mental health issues were dangerous and unpredictable. Participant Two stated yes, and he defined it as when a person is aware of his or her mental health and seeks out help for it. Participant Three was uncertain about the specifics but believed mental health awareness is a beneficial approach to addressing mental health concerns. Participant Four noted that he was not

sure but felt it was a person's understanding of his or her mental health and that he or she seeks to manage it daily. Participant Five said he was not sure. Participant Six said mental health awareness means knowing when therapy is needed, though he was unsure. Participant Seven stated that he did not know what mental health awareness was, but thought it was about caring for your mental health daily.

Participant Eight felt that mental health issues are caused by a traumatic experience, making one weak. Participant nine stated that people with mental health issues were weak-minded people. Participant Ten said having mental health awareness is a sign that a person is getting better with his mental health because he is becoming more aware of it to fight it. Participant Eleven is a healthy way of addressing one's mental health through self-care. Fifty percent of the men demonstrated a fair understanding of mental health awareness.

Question Two: Do you feel you have access to mental health resources, yes or no?

Participant One said he had no resources but wanted more information. Participant Two said no but does know people would help if ever reached out. Participant Three said he had no resources of which he was aware. Participant Four said that he could not think of any resources other than his family and that he really does not feel comfortable talking to them. Participant Five said he uses an app and sees a therapist regularly. Participant Six said he had no resources. Participant Seven said not really, he only uses YouTube as a resource to understand any mental health issues he thinks he may be displaying. Participant Eight stated that he does not have any resources for his mental health.

Participant Nine stated that he was aware of some resources but was afraid to use them. Participant Ten said that the only resource he was mindful of was the 988 number for suicide, but he never used it. Participant Eleven knows some and understands their importance but is not comfortable using them. Participant Twelve was not sure but would like more information. Ninety percent of the participants had no idea of the resources available to them.

Question Three: Do you perform self-care for yourself, yes or no, and how?

Participant One said that he exercises and goes on trips. Participant Two said he goes to the gym to work out for a few hours. Participant Three said that he works out every other day. Participant Four stated that he had no time for self-care due to working long hours. Participant Five stated that he would take short mini vacations every weekend. Participant Six indicated that he does not engage in any self-care. Participant Seven said that he works out three times a week. Participant Eight admitted his inconsistency but continued to promise self-improvement. Participant Nine did not respond to the question.

Participant Ten said that he reads a lot. He says he goes to Barnes and Noble to sit and read. Participant Eleven says that he writes a lot and takes bubble baths. To my surprise, Participant Eleven's admission to enjoying bubble baths created a stir in the room, where everyone who did not say bubble bath at first was now willing to admit that they enjoyed bubble baths. Participant Twelve said that he likes to go to an expensive hair salon for a haircut and get a scalp massage.

Question Four: Do you have a personal understanding of mental health for yourself, yes or no, and what is it?

Participant One said that, to him, mental health was having peace at home. I asked the participants to clarify what he meant by 'peace in the home.' He stated that no matter what his day at work looked like, he wanted peace at home. He went on to say that he wanted a low-drama atmosphere at home. Participant Two says that having mental health means having a healthy life, and a comfortable salary would do it for him. Participant Three agreed with Participant One, saying that men in general tend to live their lives for their families by providing for and protecting them; the least he should have is peace at home.

Participant Four says that mental health to him was not coming to fight with my wife. Participant Five stated the same thing about mental health—having peace. Participant Six said having peace with God gives him peace of mind. Participant Seven noted that mental health to him was to be able to provide for and protect his family. Participant Eight said that he has never given it any thought. Participant Nine said that having peace at home is essential. Participant Ten stated that mental health to him was to get plenty of sleep, which he does not. Participant Eleven stated that having peace with God was essential to him. Participant Twelve noted that he wanted to provide for his family.

Question Five: Do you know how your mental health affects your physical health?

Participant One stated that when he gets stressed, he gets bad headaches. Participant Two stated that his mental health affects his sleep. Participant Three noted

that his lack of mental health had somehow caused him to make bad decisions. Participant Four indicated that when he gets stressed, he tends to procrastinate. Participant Five stated that he gets severe headaches when he gets stressed. Participant Six indicated that he gets headaches when he is stressed.

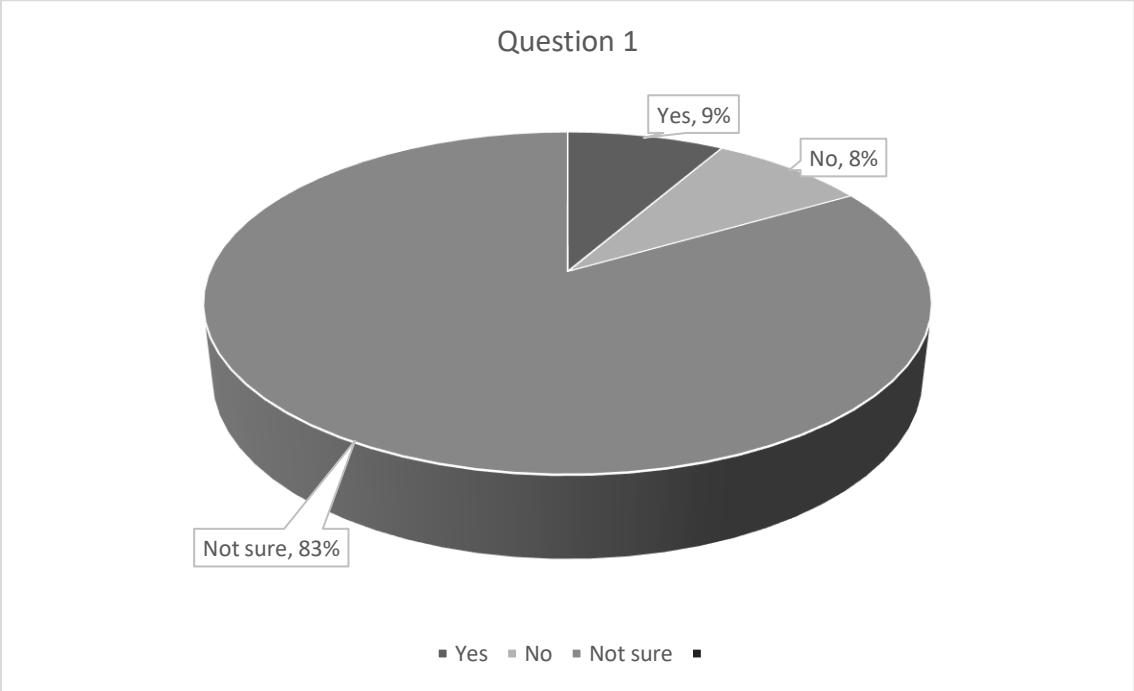
Participant Seven stated that he gets stomach aches when he is too stressed. Participant Eight indicated that he gets a severe migraine when he is stressed. Participant Nine stated that he tends to overeat when he is stressed. Participant Ten stated that he gets headaches when he is worried. Participant Eleven stated that he overeats when he is stressed, causing him to gain a lot of weight. Participant Twelve reports he gets stomach aches when under a lot of stress.

Question Six: Do you have someone to go to for mental health support?

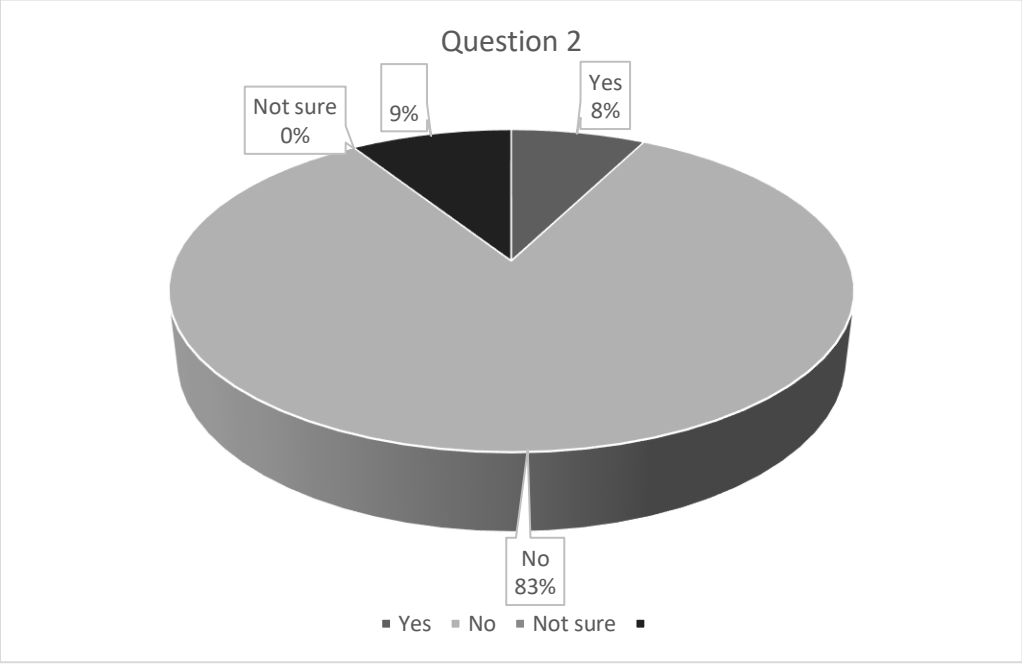
Participant One stated, yes, that he would go to his father. Participant Two said that he had a friend since childhood to whom he would go. Participant Three said his go-to person was his best friend. Participant Four said that he would call the crisis hotline. Participant Five stated that he tends to go to his wife. Participant Six stated that he calls his therapist. Participant Seven indicated that he goes to his best friend.

Participant Eight stated that he called the crisis hotline. Participant Nine noted that he calls his accountability brother. Participant Ten stated that he made an appointment to see his therapist. Participant Eleven noted that he did not have anyone to whom he felt comfortable talking. Participant Twelve also stated that he does not really reach out to anyone.

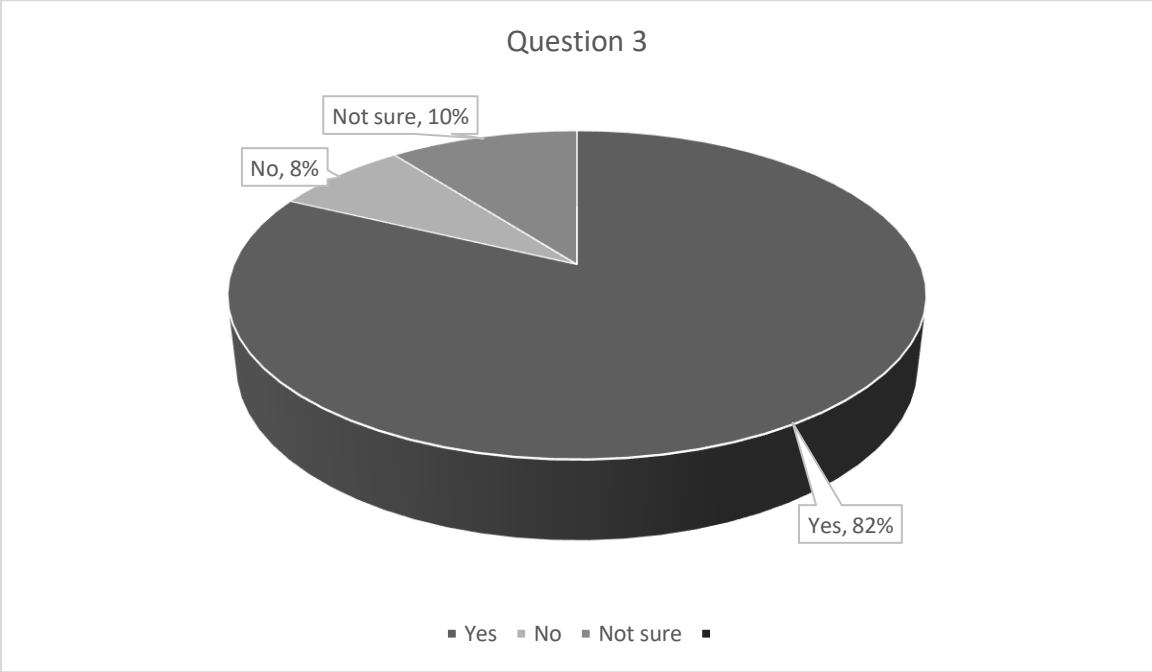
Data Results of the Pre-Survey Questions



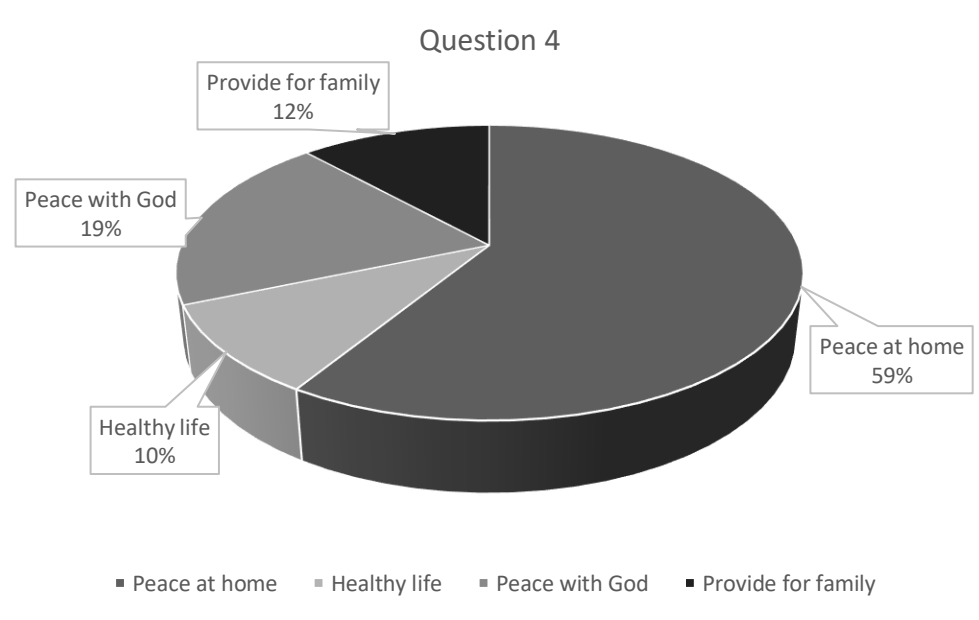
1. Do you know what mental health awareness is? If so, define it.



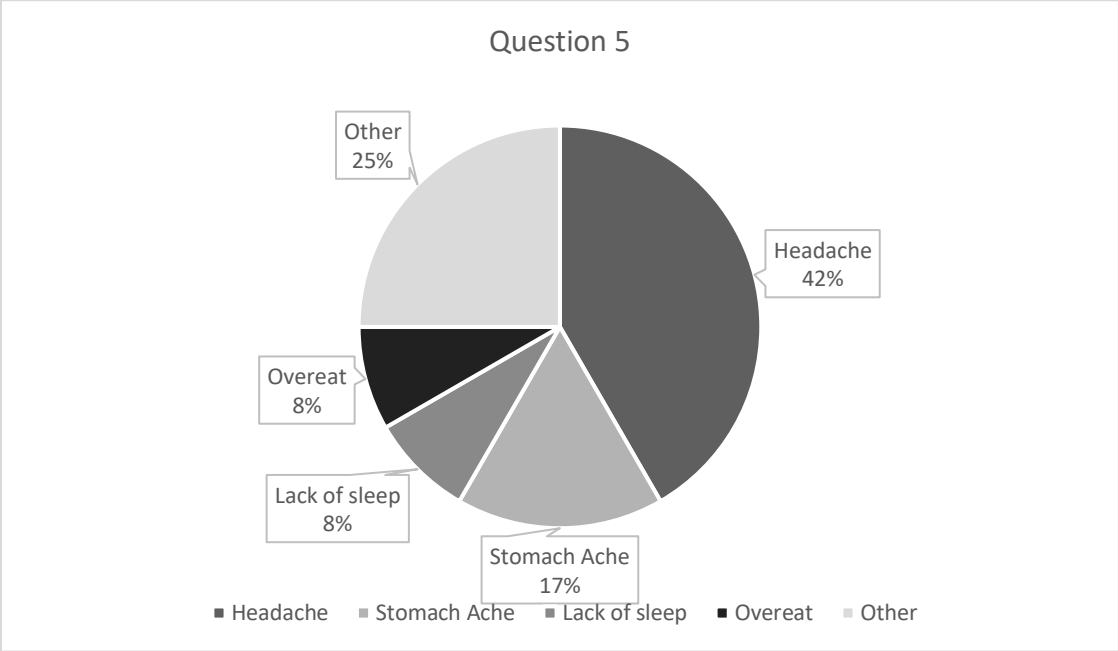
2. Do you feel you have access to mental health resources, yes or no?



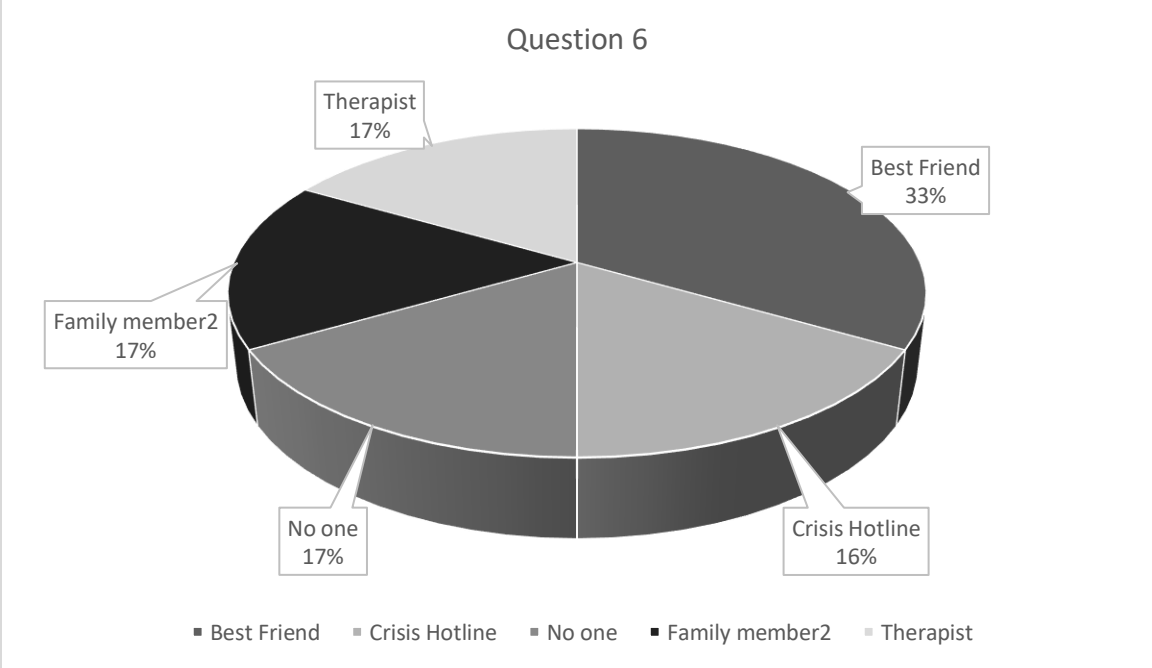
3. Do you perform self-care for yourself, yes or no, and how?



4. Do you have a personal understanding of mental health for yourself, yes or no, and what is it?

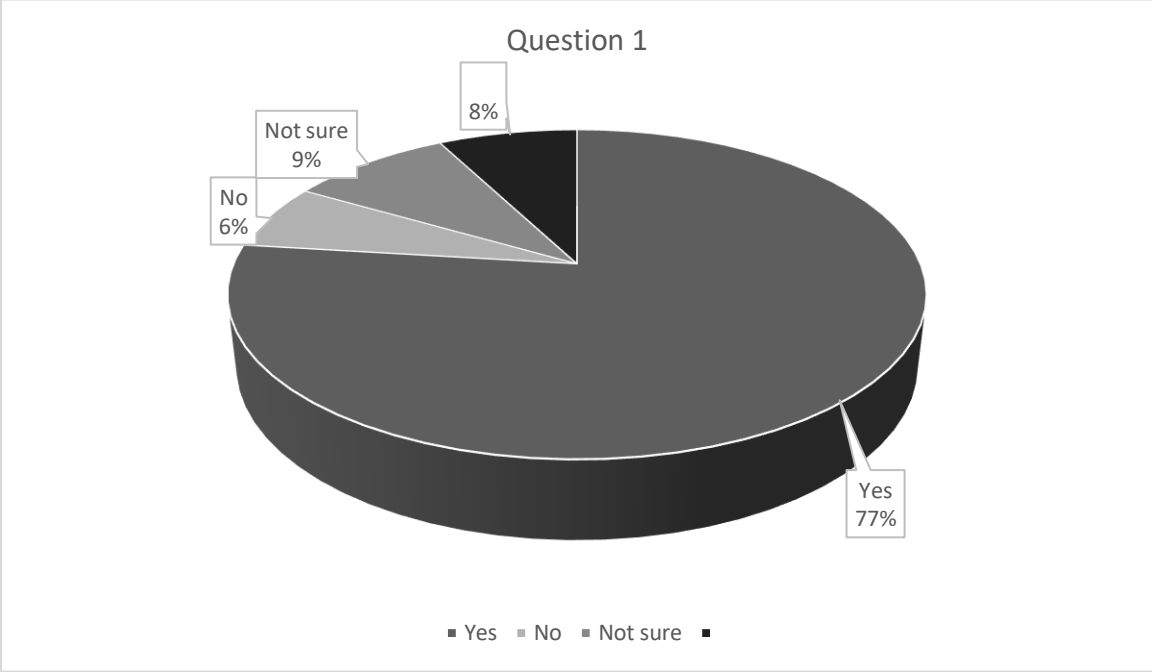


5. Do you know how your mental health affects your physical health?

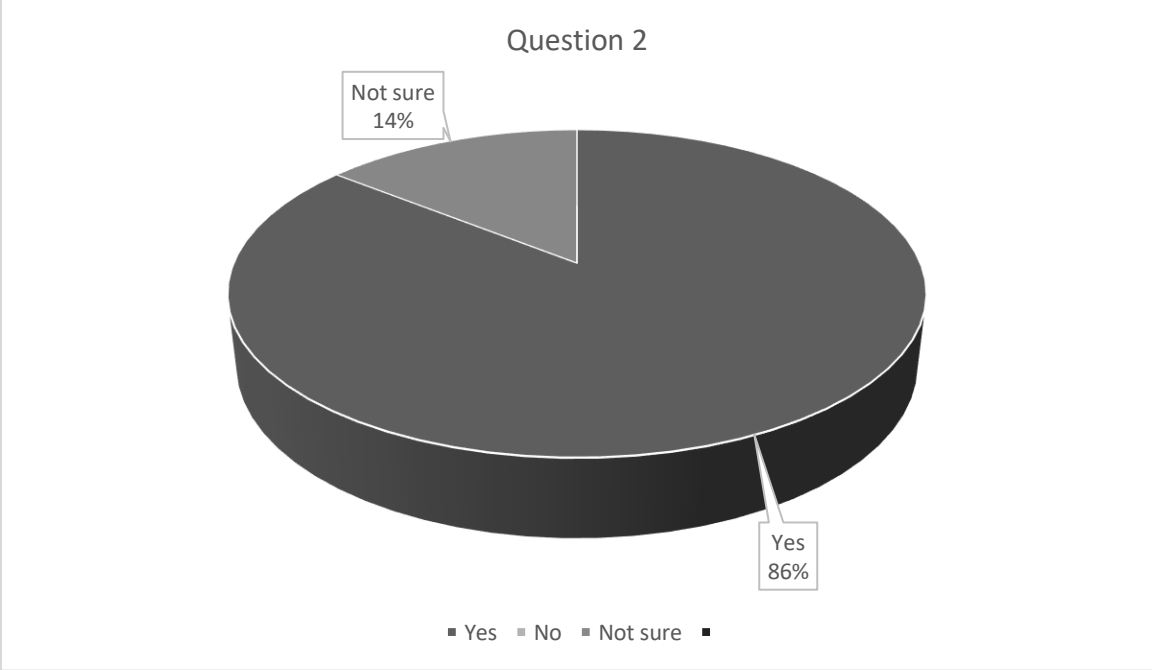


6. Do you have someone to go to for mental health support?

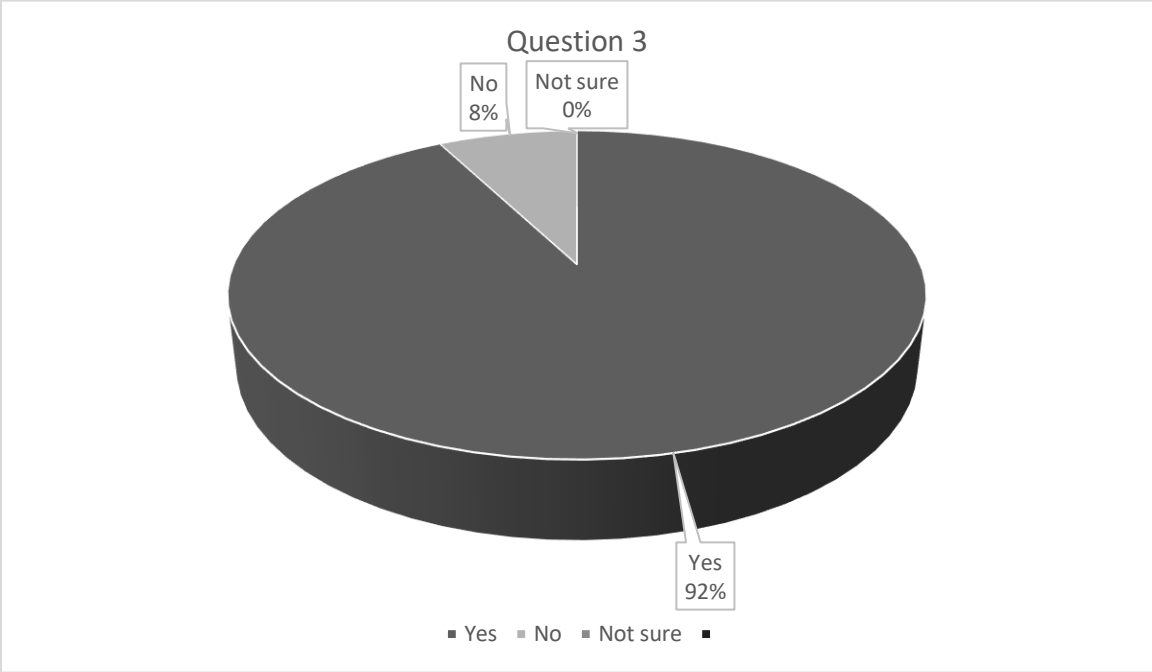
Data of Post-Survey Questions



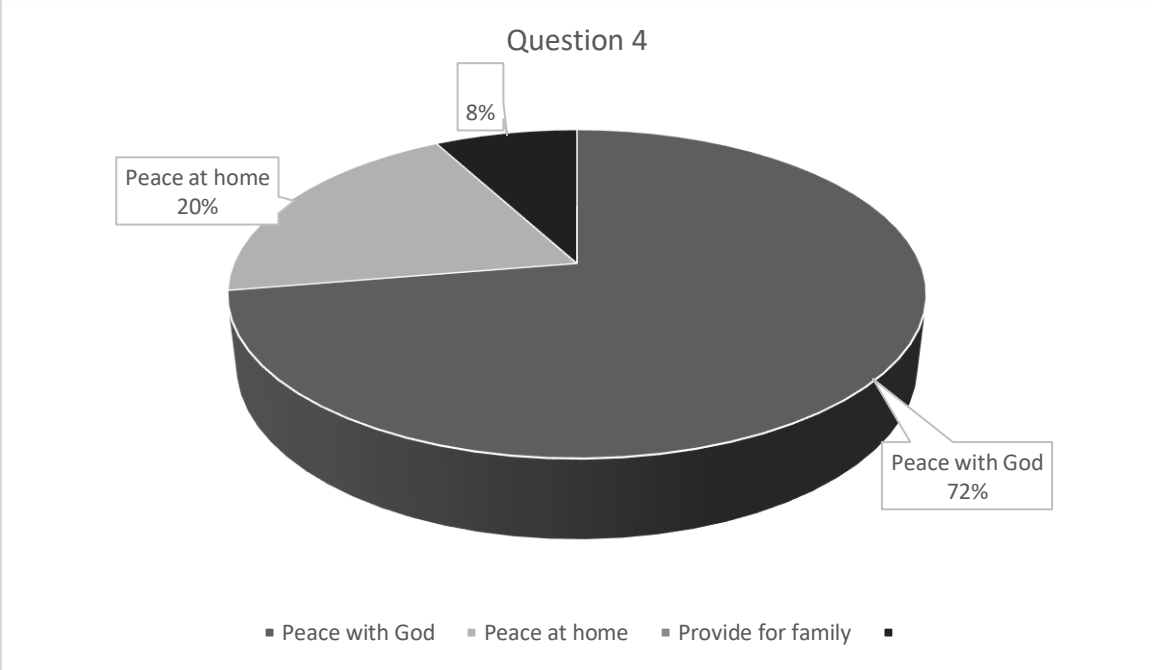
1. Do you know what mental health awareness is? If so, define it.



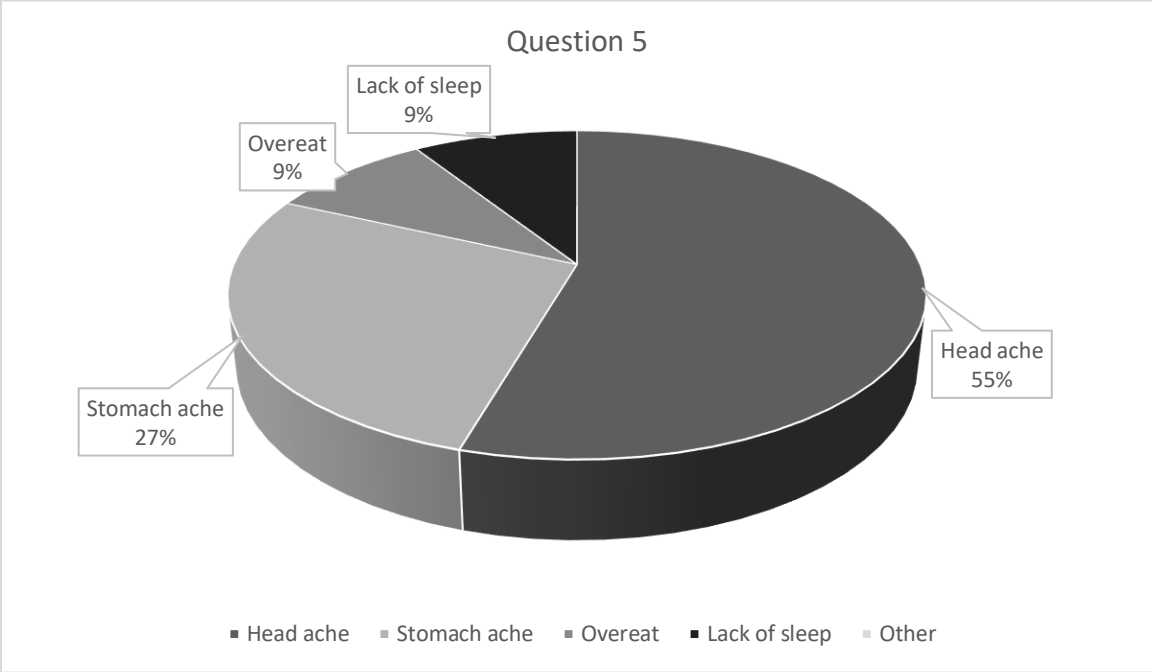
2. Do you feel you have access to mental health resources, yes or no?



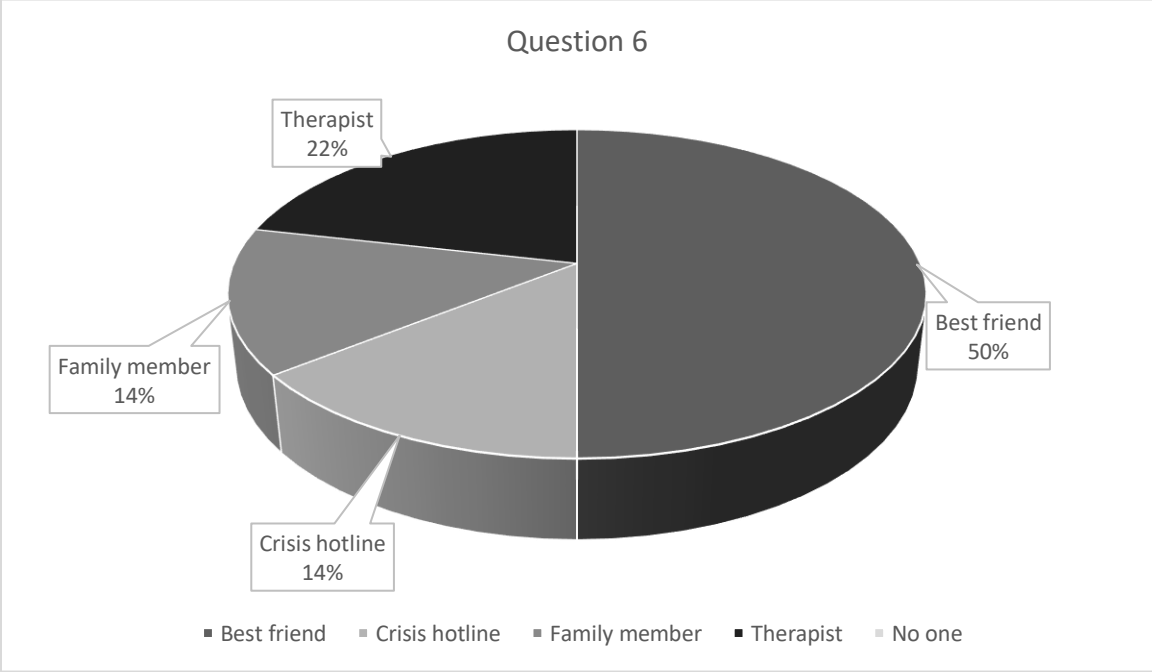
3. Do you perform self-care for yourself, yes or no, and how?



4. Do you have a personal understanding of mental health for yourself, yes or no, and what is it?



5. Do you know how your mental health affects your physical health?



6. Do you have someone to go to for mental health support?

Conclusion

Raising mental health awareness among men is a vital and urgent issue, highlighting the neglect of mental wellness. The goal was to encourage men to take a more active role in caring for their mental health. This initiative is deeply personal, reflecting my own struggles with mental health. It was crucial to encourage participants to be vulnerable and to feel loved and acknowledged. The project also tackled the stigma that men encounter daily, which often prevents them from seeking help when necessary.

It was essential for the participants to grasp that they were in good company, for we pointed out in the project the various men and women of God who struggled with their mental health, such as Moses, Elijah, David, Jonah, and Paul. The project embodied the biblical principles of the mission of Jesus and the church, as we endeavor to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free (Lk. 4:18).

There were some challenges that the project found difficult to hurdle for it to work. First, the project was scheduled for the same day and time as the men's Bible study. Some of the men expressed their displeasure that my project was scheduled for the same time as their Bible study, suggesting that no one would attend. Ironically, some of the men came across as being hostile towards me for the above reason. They apparently thought my project was just another Bible study.

Another challenge is that men are generally opposed to any conversation about mental health. For that reason, the project began with what appeared to be low attendance at first. Still, the pastor (Pastor Lupina) escorted four retired pastors to the class because she anticipated that I might not receive the support needed to complete the project

effectively. This made me feel a little saddened by the hostility of the men from the other Bible study and by knowing that no one would have shown if it had not been for the pastor's assistance.

Another factor contributing to the project's barrier was the racial tension I felt from the men. It is important to note that this was not the first project I presented to Northern Hill United Methodist Church. My first project was called “Healing Intergenerational Trauma of Descendants of Slaves in the African American Community,” which was rejected by the church board. I was very concerned. The climate in Texas, unfortunately, is to wipe every vestige of Black history, and I felt this was the church’s agenda, as well. I must also note that my family and I are the only Black family in the entire church of 2000 members.

The questionnaire assessment shows an increase in men taking an interest in their own mental health. I was able to assess that men expressed more of a desire to address their mental health as well as address their past unaddressed traumas. I felt that presenting the project via PowerPoint was extremely helpful in keeping me on task and from wandering. It was useful for participants to receive a copy of the project's PowerPoint presentation to reflect on after the project was over.

This assessment reveals that the participants felt the information provided
The session was highly informative and easy to understand. Participants especially enjoyed the group discussions, as the topics were engaging and encouraged everyone to share their opinions. The ground rules for conduct during discussions helped maintain order and foster mutual respect.

Participants Three and Seven said group discussions made them consider the impact of their mental health on others. The group discussion exposed a raw truth that had not even been considered until it surfaced. This kind of exposure sparked naturally emerging group discussions. I took note of these new group discussions to incorporate into future group discussions.

I observed that the group discussion gradually fostered a safe environment where participants felt comfortable being vulnerable. As the facilitator, I encouraged men to engage by sharing my own struggles with mental health, which men could relate to. For instance, I described how managing mental health issues while serving in ministry has been particularly difficult due to the stigma directed at leaders. This sparked meaningful debate, particularly among retired pastors.

The individual interviews were invaluable, but they had some challenges I did not expect. I interviewed each participant via Zoom, but many were multitasking while answering and discussing the interview questions. In the future, it would be better to conduct the interview in person and inform participants that being fully engaged and free of distractions is essential to the project. On the other hand, the personal interviews were very productive in exposing the participants' real feelings about their own mental health and how, for the first time, they felt the need to do something about it.

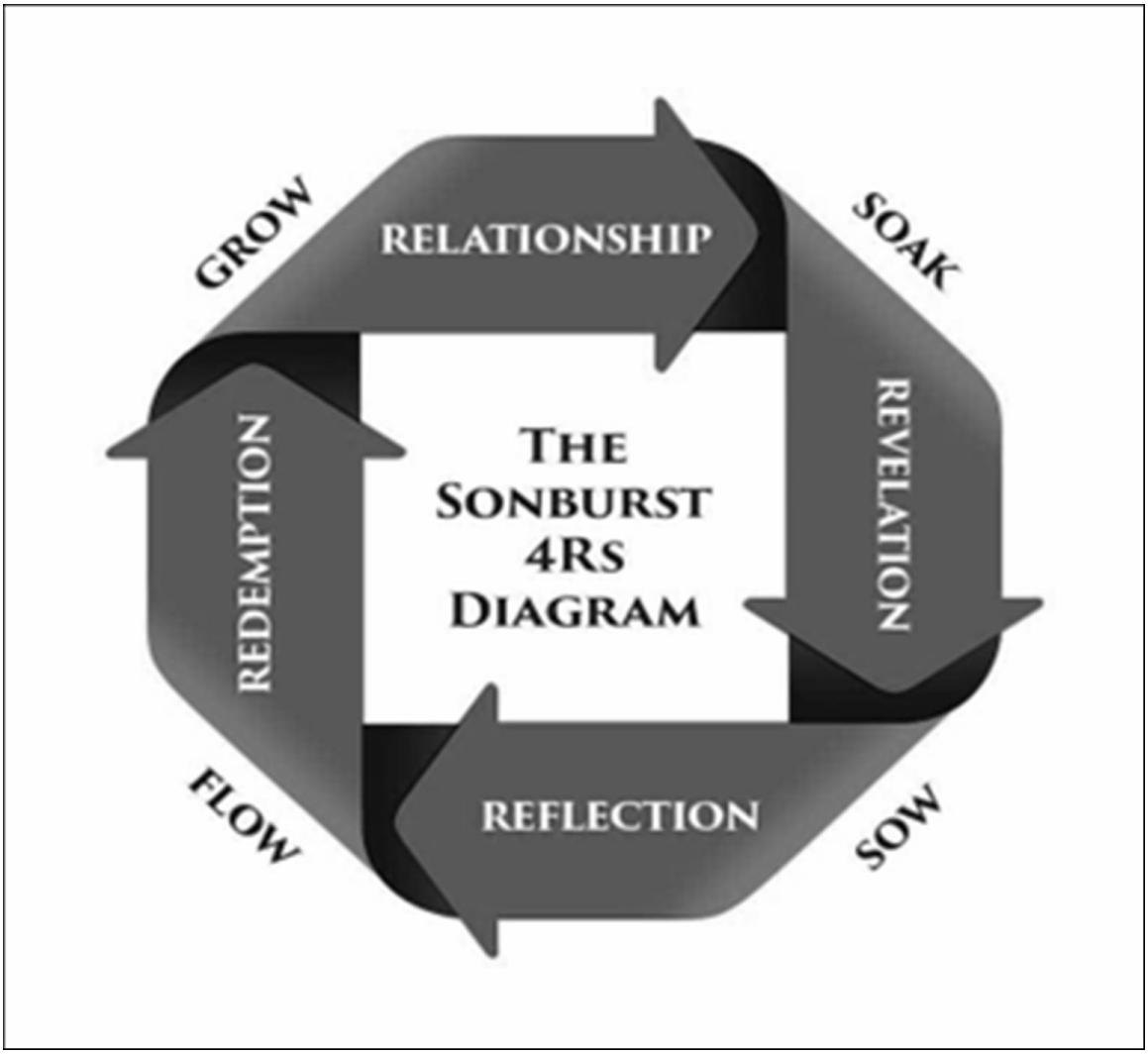
I believe the reason for the exposure of their real feelings had a lot to do with them feeling like they could not say certain things to me in a one-on-one discussion. Secondly, my willingness to be vulnerable about the nature of my mental health was like a tall glass of whiskey, giving them the courage to say what they could not freely express in a group session. Overall, the project successfully fostered mental health awareness, but

it could be improved. I intend to view my project as a work in progress, constantly evolving as I discover new information and methods to help men prioritize their mental health.

APPENDIX A

SOAK, SOW, FLOW CHART

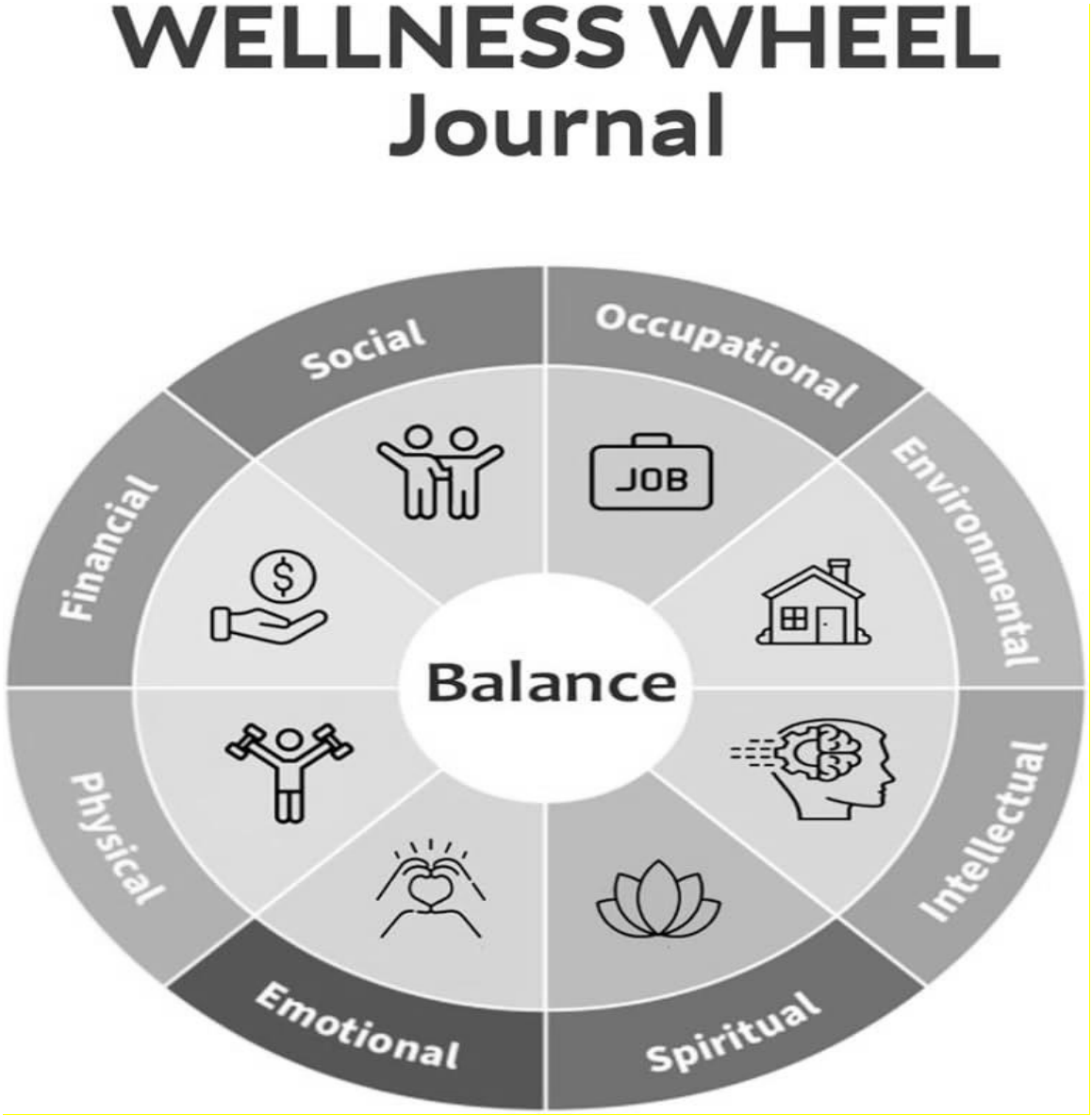
Soak, Sow, Flow Chart



APPENDIX B

WELLNESS WHEEL JOURNAL

Wellness Wheel Journal



APPENDIX C

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY

Pre- and Post-Survey

1. Do you know what mental health awareness is? Yes or no, if so, define.

2. Do you feel you have access to mental health resources? What are they?

3. Do you perform self-care for yourself, yes or no, and how?

4. What does your personal understanding of mental health mean to you?

5. How does mental health affect your physical health?

If you were having problems with your mental health, who would you go to for support?

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